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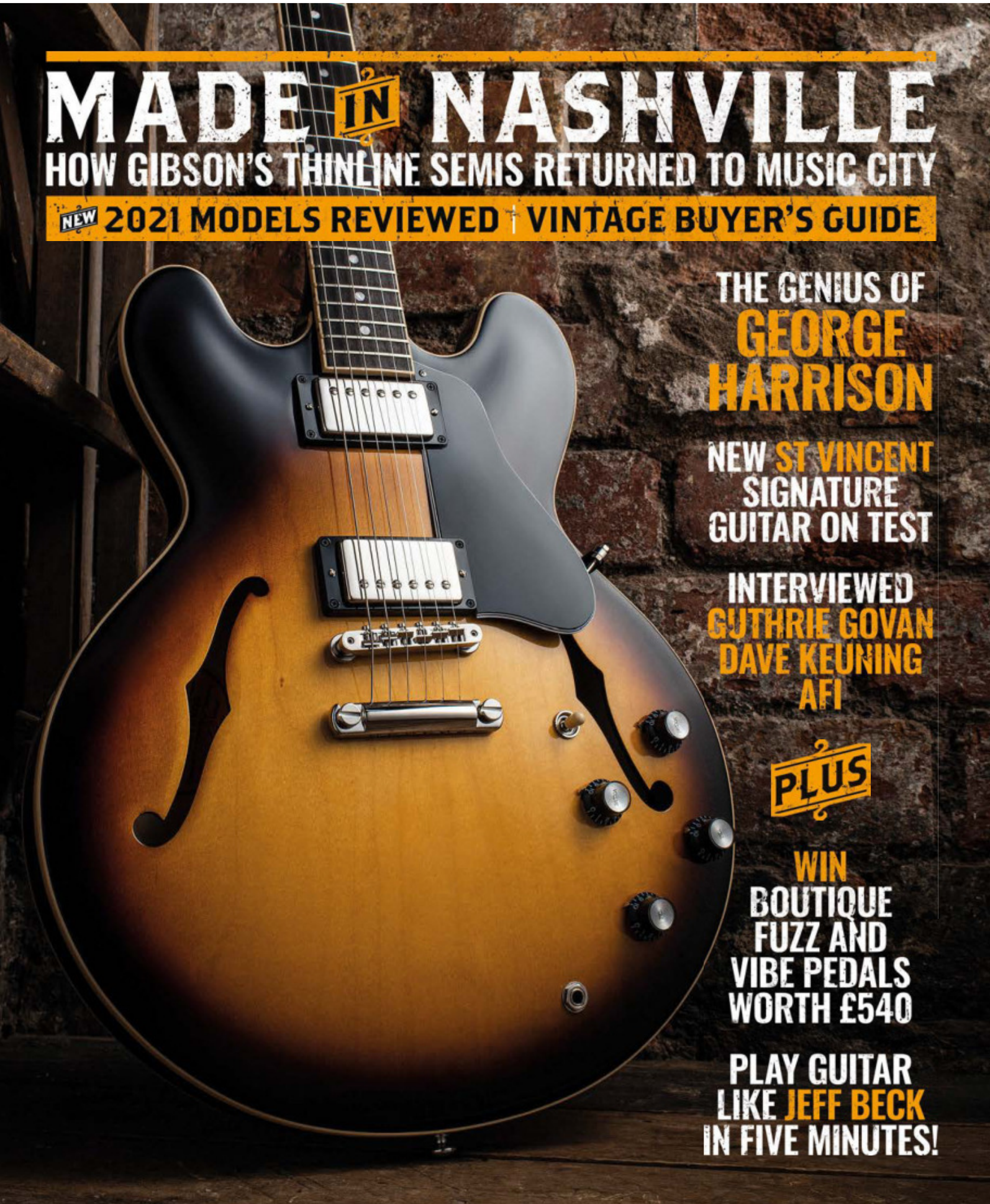

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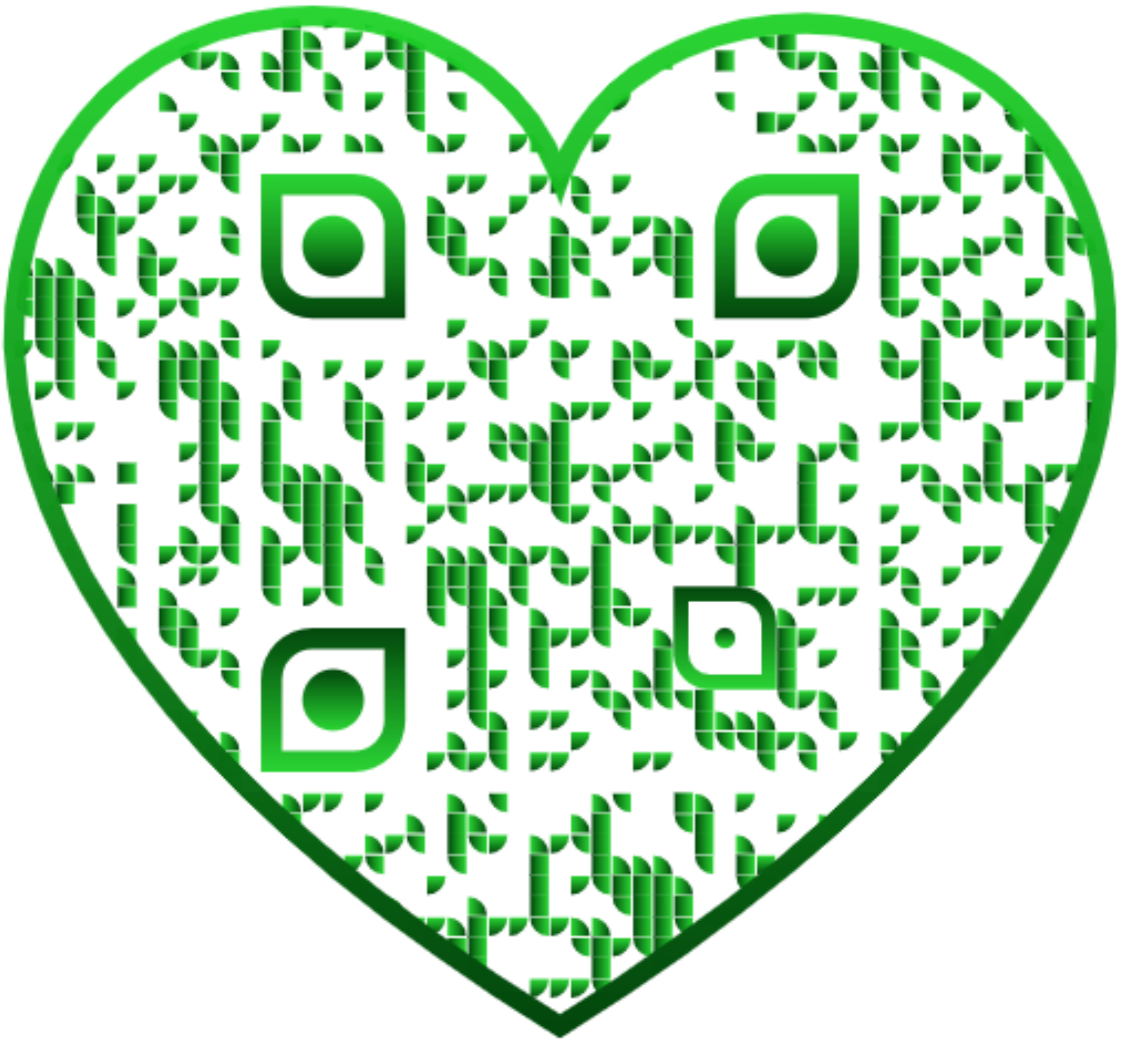

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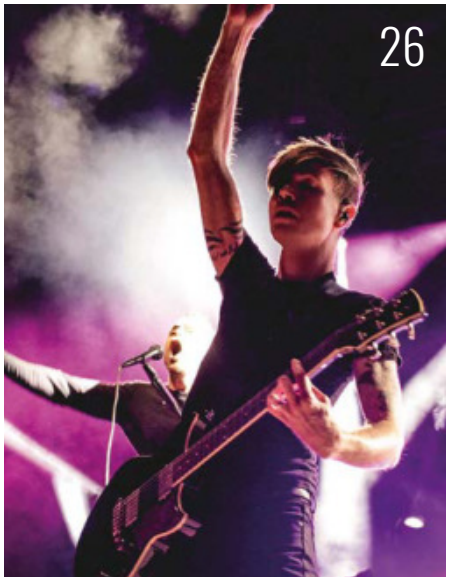
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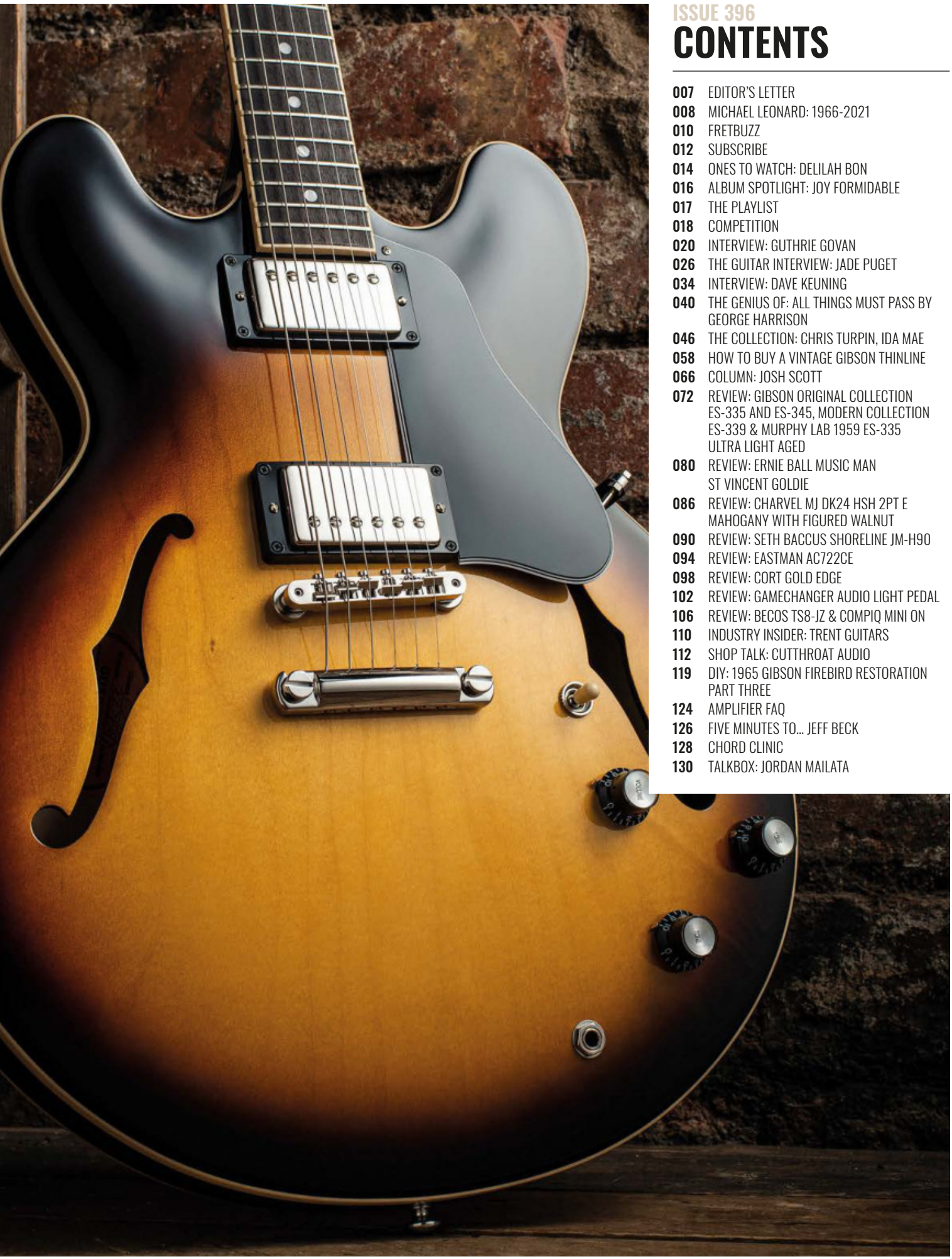

ISSUE 396

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EDITOR'S LETTER

GUITAR TOWN

Welcome to the September issue of *Guitar Magazine*. This month's coverstar is one of a quartet of Gibson's new Nashville-made ES models that we have on test – and the timing couldn't be more apt. As I type this, I'm en route to Music City to attend the 2021 Summer NAMM show. In addition to being my first long-haul flight since the start of the pandemic, rather more significantly, it's also the first major in-person musical instrument industry event to take place in North America since Winter NAMM in January 2020. By the time you read this, *Guitar.com* will be awash with all the hottest new gear from the show, so head to the website and follow our socials to ensure you don't miss a beat.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find a useful field guide to vintage Gibson thinlines – all those model numbers can get confusing, right? – as well as reviews of must-try products from the likes of Music Man, Seth Baccus, Eastman, Gamechanger Audio and more.

On a sad note, over the page we also pay tribute to Michael Leonard, former *Guitar Magazine* editor and still a regular contributor to this title, who passed away in July. Somewhat poignantly, Mike also penned the feature on George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* that begins on p40. As ever, Mike did a excellent job of examining the influence and impact of an album that's almost certainly the finest solo work by any Beatle, and includes some wonderful cameos from other legendary artists.

The 50th anniversary of George's masterpiece is celebrated this year with the release of various remixed and expanded editions. If Santa Claus happens to be reading this, I'd like the Uber Deluxe Edition, please – complete with gnomes. Enjoy this month's mag and I'll see you next time.

Chris Vinnicombe
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Michael Leonard

— 1966-2021 —

The *Guitar Magazine* team were shocked and saddened to hear of the passing of Michael Leonard on 2 July following a short battle with cancer. Editor of *Guitar Magazine* from 1993 to 1998, Michael was later appointed editor of *Guitar Techniques*, *Guitarist*, *MusicRadar*, *Country Music* and *Vintage Rock*, and in recent years had been a regular contributor to *Guitar.com*. His other roles included a stint as European Editor of *Gibson.com* and editor of the official *Fender Magazine*. He also contributed to *Mojo*, *Q*, *The Independent*, *Rolling Stone* and *Billboard*.

Michael was born in Wigan in 1966 but grew up in Exeter, graduating from the University of Bath with a degree in economics and politics in 1988. By his own admission, he "fell into" publishing in the early 1990s but, during the decades that followed, Michael would go on to edit more than 300 individual magazines and author more than 1,000 articles, interviewing a who's who of the biggest stars in music along the way.

Over the years, several members of the current *Guitar Magazine* team worked alongside Michael on a variety of titles. In 2004, he was even responsible for giving *Guitar Magazine* chief editor Chris Vinnicombe his first job in the industry.

"Mike's contribution to guitar journalism in the UK was transformative," said Chris. "His inclusive and forward-facing outlook helped drag guitar magazines into the 21st century and open the door for artists who valued songs and melody over technical prowess. He also saw the online and social media explosions of the 2000s as huge opportunities rather than phenomena to be feared. But more than all that, Mike was a thoroughly decent human being with a razor wit, and a formidable writer whose work continues to be an inspiration. I can speak for the rest of the team when I say we're all going to miss him a great deal. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his wife Linda, and children Aimee and Sam." *G*

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Black Diamond strings: not exactly slinky

DIAMOND GEEZER

I was enjoying the beautiful image of the vintage Gretsch guitar in your most recent issue [How To Buy A Vintage Gretsch, issue 395] when my eye was drawn to a packet of old Black Diamond strings in the guitar's case and I was instantly transported all the way back in time to 1965.

Back then, I was the proud possessor of a Futurama jumbo acoustic and, at that time, about the only easily available strings for budding guitar players were either Black Diamond or Cathedral. Most of my guitarist friends agreed the former were the preferred make but there was one definite drawback – there was no choice of string gauge. Not only could you not choose light or medium strings to make life easier on yourself but these heavy-gauge strings also came with a wound G! These telegraph lines, combined with a somewhat suspect action on the Futurama, made my hamfisted efforts to emulate Davy Graham, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn almost pointless.

This struggle continued until one day, when I was complaining about this very fact to a gentlemen called Gerry, who was the owner of Potter's Music Shop in Richmond. Gerry cleverly suggested that I replace the first E with a banjo G octave string, and move the others down until the A became the sixth E. Magic! It might not pass muster these days but at the time all I could say was, 'Thank you, Gerry. Problem solved!' I don't remember what happened to the resulting pile of new, unused E strings. Perhaps I used them as bike brake cables? They were certainly thick enough! Thanks as always for an entertaining magazine.

CHRIS STEVENSON, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for sharing your tale with us, Chris. In this era of seemingly endless options when it comes to string gauge and brand, it certainly makes us appreciate what we have!

Does the future belong to the Quad Cortex and similar digital marvels?

DIGITAL WITNESS

Back in issue 395's editor's letter, you asked for our feelings on abandoning traditional amps and effects and 'going digital'. I wanted to get in touch as the extra free time we've all been given thanks to COVID in the past year or so has meant that I've finally taken the leap and have done just that.

Gone is my 25-pound (in weight, not cost) pedalboard. Gone is my trusty Blues Jr, replaced with a second-hand Line 6 Helix LT that I now use going straight into the mixer. Well, okay not straight in – I kept my trusty TC PolyTune as I found the Helix's built-in option not quite to my liking. But other than that, I've gone all-in!

It perhaps helps that I also play keys and, as such, have had a lot of exposure to the power of digital. But I also took advantage of the time away from playing out and jamming to really learn the Helix. What made it so easy to get going was buying some setups from the WorshipTutorials.com guys, as their patches are both excellent and cheap. I've since sold off all my pedals and paid for the Helix three times over.

Now, I did not tell my bandmates that I had done this but, at the first jam, they didn't even notice until I told them. The power of the Helix is real – it enables me to save all my presets and set up set lists. It's awesome. As I am in Canada, we are well behind the States on lifting restrictions for gigs. We don't have one for months yet but I am ready to save time on setup – and no more lugging stuff around!

VAUGHN WARRINGTON, VIA EMAIL

The benefits of going digital are getting harder to ignore. If even our retro-obsessed chief editor is thinking of ditching valve amps for something digital and portable, maybe guitar has finally reached its paradigm shift? As ever, keep your views on this topic coming in…

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ONES TO WATCH

DELILAH BON

WORDS RACHEL ROBERTS

After years of touring with her band Hands Off Gretel, Yorkshire punk-rocker Lauren Tate built an emotional cacoon out of the anger she felt at the misogyny and social injustice she saw all around, and emerged reborn as fiery new rap-rocking alter-ego, Delilah Bon

Who is Delilah Bon and why did you feel the urge to bring her to life?

"Delilah was created last year completely by accident. I was touring with my band [Hands Off Gretel] when I spoke out about women's safety at shows. I wrote about my own experiences online, how I was having to deal with men trying to kiss and touch me off stage, only to be met with resistance from people saying that I was asking for it because of how I chose to dress. I was riddled with anxiety then, playing shows. A man started shouting 'hashtag me too' at me on stage as I tried to sing, and I saw girls getting shoved to the back. I had so much I wanted to say but I was hitting a wall creatively. I guess that's why I started rapping last year; I had so many words and this allowed me to get them all in. Delilah's songs started off to empower myself when I felt small. I realised quickly she could be that for other people too. She's like a big sister to girls and non-binary kids now."

How does your songwriting differ as Delilah Bon from Hands Off Gretel?

"Every idea of my Delilah songs starts as a bassline or hook hummed into my phone before I even pick up an instrument. It's transformed my writing style, being able to visualise the track before I even write it. Sometimes it starts with a topic or a music-video idea, then I'll hum a riff and pick up my short-scale Fender bass to bring it all to life. Producing as I'm writing means that I can layer different instruments to create unique sounds for each song, which sets it apart from recording as a band. The sound I make is a mesh of all my influences; old-school Salt-N-Pepa girl-gang vocals, fuzzy nu-metal guitars with occasional metal-style scream vocals, Rico Nasty-style snarl and Eminem sarcasm."

How was it self-producing the entire album?

"I've always had an ear for production. Many times, producers have found my input annoying. I've had to push for a lot in the studio, particularly with effects and how

"I MAINLY USE MY RELIC'D AMERICAN STRAT WITH A SUHR HUMBUCKER IN THE BRIDGE AND TWO FENDER TEXAS SPECIAL SINGLE-COILS. I MIX IT UP BETWEEN THE SWOLLEN PICKLE AND THE DS-1"

I like to hear my vocals. Producers tend to use a lot of auto-tune and reverb, aiming for that perfect, smooth vocal and it's always a battle having to fight for any creative input. Naturally, I had no intentions of involving a producer when I created Delilah. It was my chance to really see what I could achieve without them. I do hope to work with the right producers eventually. I wouldn't rule that out. I just need to prove to myself and the many people that have doubted me throughout the years."

What influenced the fuzzed-out tones on the record?
"My teenage years were Nirvana and Hole, Babes In Toyland and Mudhoney – grungier the better. I loved the chaos of their guitar tones, the offsets and the Big Muff pedals. Meeting Sean, the guitarist of my band, made me fall in love with fuzzy pedals even more. The Boss DS-1 was the first I owned, because of Kurt, then the Way Huge Swollen Pickle and, of course, Sean's favourite, the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff. In my studio set up right now I have the Positive Grid Bias FX 2 guitar preset, which I use for heavier tracks. But mainly I use the standard Logic presets and tweak the crap out of them!"

Tell us about your main guitar and pedal set-up.
"Over the years, I've had a Squier VM Jazzmaster, a Fender HH Mexican Jazzmaster, a Squier VM Mustang. Now I mainly use my relic'd American Stratocaster with a Suhr humbucker in the bridge and two Fender Texas Special single-coils. I mix it up between the Swollen Pickle by Way Huge and the Boss DS-1 on tour with my band. Though lately, after upgrading to my Fender Twin amp, I tend to just use the clean and drive channels."

Tell us about a guitarist who inspires you.
"Kurt Cobain, obviously, but I'd like to mention Kat Bjelland from Babes In Toyland. Her playing style is ferocious and just bonkers. I love it so much. The way she holds her guitar, up on her tip toes as she screams, made me want to play when I was a teenager, seeing a woman as wild as that."

What's interesting about your approach to guitar?
"What I always loved about Nirvana songs was the fact that I could actually play them when I started out. I try to keep the riffs simple and fun, especially my basslines. I imagine young girls starting out and buying their first guitar, and I wanna be the first songs they learn and play with confidence. I've never been interested in playing solos or learning to shred. My style of guitar sits alongside the vocals – doesn't distract, just acts as fuel to the vocal fire when I need it. I love stomping on that fuzz pedal and blowing up the chorus. Thank you, Mr. Cobain."

Which song off the new album are you most excited about playing live and when can we see you play next?
"I'm so excited about playing *Chiquitita* live. While writing and producing this album, I'd take breaks every few hours to just hit play and dance around the room, fantasising a crowd in front of me. I wrote *Chiquitita* about an older woman who wants to let her hair down and go wild but feels held back by her husband. I get shivers just thinking about what the live show will be like when I eventually hit the road. I'm touring the UK with my band this year but hopefully after that Delilah can have a turn."

What does the future look like for Delilah Bon?
"There's just so much music to come as I evolve as an artist and continue to scare and challenge myself every day. I want to do a horror project, star in my own movie, create the Delilah comic book series, tour with my own Delilah Bon circus of boss babes… the list is endless. I'm so grateful that I have so many ideas. The future is mine!" G

***Delilah Bon* is out now on Trash Queen Records**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

THE JOY FORMIDABLE
INTO THE BLUE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

From visualising guitar tones in the natural world to finding inspiration in wind chimes, Joy Formidable show that there's no limits to inspiration on their first outing for Hassle Records

Now signed to the London-based indie label Hassle, North Walians' The Joy Formidable continue to make headway with their take on brooding, anthemic rock. On their last LP *Aaarth*, the trio united the personal with the mythical and symbolic, and that theme broadly continues here, with vocalist and guitarist Ritzy Bryan emulating nature through her melodies and riffs. She gives us her top moments from *Into The Blue*.

FARRAGO

"I love experimenting with guitar sounds, the stranger the better. I sometimes go into the studio with a visual of what I want to hear, the cross-sensory idea of 'seeing music'. A lot of my visualisations are inspired by the natural world. Can you get a guitar to sound like the ambience of the night sky? The breaking of a wave? The opening guitar on *Farrago* was a happy accident but to me it sounds like walking through water. It's somehow inconsequential but, at the same time, stories needs the right atmosphere. The development of the guitars in *Farrago* was probably one of my favourite writing moments on the record, mostly in the instrumental section. It's wave after wave of new sections and layers, high guitars calling and answering with whammies and pitch-shifters. You find new colour and depth depending on how or where you're listening."

BACK TO NOTHING

"It's sometimes difficult to remember what instrumentation or lyric birthed a song. But *Back To Nothing* was definitely rooted by the lead riff. When we came to the final recording, we layered the riff with more than one guitar, which was a different approach to the original demo. There's a bottom and a mid guitar that's growly and rumbling with a tremolo bass, but the high guitar is clean, with a glassiness that gives it the haunting quality that we wanted. It's a song about facing your past, that the ghosts and the memories prepare you for a better future. I like to think that the use of sonic displacement in the track is symbolic of changing the way that you think. The chord progression repeats but where the riff lands is different."

INTERVAL

"Space and rhythm are a big part of this record. The verses have two or three guitar parts that weave together to create a certain suspended effect with the piano. It's a way of deconstructing the idea of using chords, and instead building melodies – and the chords – from multiple layers of guitars. It's funny how, figuratively, the production echoes the sentiment or the story of a song. Musically, the track plays with the idea of intervals, especially with the eighth-note delay giving it this dreamy step effect. We had a lot of fun with the extended solo. It's a passage that repeats but gets more layered as it goes on. That's a big part of our aesthetic. We love making use of timbres and filling the gaps. There were two main guitars used on this one, mostly for their subtle differences in sound: my 1992 Fender Strat, maple-necked and well rounded, lots of sustain, combined with a more recent rosewood Strat, which was cleaner and brighter."

SEVIER

"A stonker this one, with very high guitars, whammied (is that a word?) up two octaves. The quarter-note delay on the guitar gives a pulse to everything. We wanted it to have a dance-like quality. This, and another track called *Detour*, which we're releasing through the Music Club, have more of a psychedelic, synthetic sound. Lots of low-octave guitars with an Eastern/bluesy element that makes use of the flattened second and seventh. We go between analogue gear and digital tools such as amp-modelling effects in Guitar Rig, anything we can get our hands on. We like being able to skew the guitars into other less recognisable instruments and sounds."

CHIMES

"This song takes inspiration from one of our favourite guitarists, Jimi Hendrix, with the opening suspended fifth chord riff. As the song develops, the riff takes on different voicings and layers, many of them recorded on different guitars, including a Japanese Greco LP. We enjoyed playing with the relationship between riff and vocal melody. The vocal is insistent, whereas the guitar changes are on offbeats. The sentimental story to this track involves a set of wind chimes my grandfather made me, the high guitars are purposefully quite plinky and pure to mirror the sound of them." **G**

Into The Blue is out 20 August on Hassle Records

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

SAM FENDER
Seventeen Going Under
The Geordie Springsteen returns with the title track from his sophomore LP, packed with rousing guitars and a chorus that is sure to propel him to stratospheric levels of success.

EDDIE TATTON
Rise
On Tatton's first release for Stunted Records, the blues-fusion player leans more into his 1960s influences than usual. Listen closely and you'll hear hints of an acid-laced Mamas & The Papas.

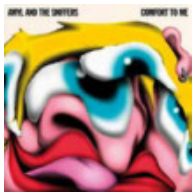
BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD
Crescent Man vs Demolition Dan
The Cardiff rockers latest single takes aim at the property developers tearing down established venues in their home town, with of plenty glam-rock guitars and swagger to boot.

TURNSTILE
Alien Love Call
Featuring a guest spot from singer-songwriter Blood Orange, the seasoned hardcore band lean into their woozy side with modulated guitars and more modern production. A welcome change of pace.

GEORGE HARRISON
Cosmic Empire
A previously unreleased demo available on the anniversary edition of *All Things Must Pass* (see p40), this stripped-back take details Harrison's exemplary acoustic chops and songwriting prowess.

DOUGIE STU
Henny
Released last year and now pressed on to vinyl by legendary imprint Heavenly Records, this jazzy single features Tortoise guitarist Jeff Parker's pocket grooves backed by luscious violin melodies.

PIP BLOM
It Should Have Been Fun
The new single from the Dutch four-piece features sultry rhythm guitars and lilting lead melodies that might just cement it as a BBC Radio 6 Music classic for years to come.



AMYL & THE SNIFFERS
Guided By Angels
Opening with a monstrous bass tone, this track quickly turns into a forgotten 1970s punk gem peppered with snarling guitars and hi-hats that perfectly prop up Amy Taylor's direct vocal delivery.

COURTNEY BARNETT
Rae Street
Arguably the best steward of slacker rock of our time, Barnett woos you into a sense of raucous comfort with this track as she strays into rockabilly territory but gives it her trademark 21st century twist.

MANIC STREET PREACHERS
The Secret He Had Missed
James Dean Bradfield and co's second single from *The Ultra Vivid Lament*, this one features Sunflower Bean's Julia Cumming on vocals and nods to both Abba and 1980s Fleetwood Mac.

WOLF ALICE
The Beach II
On the closing track from the band's exemplary new album, Joff Oddie's Jaguar shines through thanks to its eerie tonality and quietly injects some tasteful modulation where appropriate.

THE WAR ON DRUGS
Living Proof
Combining some of the best elements of every Laurel Canyon-esque song ever, Adam Granduciel and friends have released one of their best yet. Stop what you're doing and listen to this right now.

COMPETITION

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FREEZE FRAME

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From the outside, it may seem as if Guthrie Govan has had a quiet 18 months. But just because he has no interest in joining the guitar influencer rat race doesn't mean the outrageously talented virtuoso hasn't been keeping himself busy. We catch up with to him to chat self-critique, the new Aristocrats live album *Freeze!*, and how the *Boss Baby 2* soundtrack gave him the chance to stretch himself into new creative areas

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

It's typical of the quirky and unconventional nature of instrumental-fusion giants The Aristocrats to release a live album 18 months into a global pandemic. But despite the fact that new album *Freeze!* captures performances from the trio's tour of Europe at the beginning of 2020, it's not totally removed from the defining event of our age: the performances were caught as the band blazed across the continent with the spectre of COVID hot on their heels. Each country they visited was on the brink of lockdown during their stay and then closed down shortly after they left. Somewhat miraculously, they completed all but two gigs of that 40-date tour

The live album is a timely reminder of what we've been missing over the past year-and-a-half. Though it features just six songs, rest assured that this is no short-player. The band customarily extend and cajole each arrangement to flex their virtuosity and sense of fun. And, as per one of their inspirations, Frank Zappa, the studio versions of songs arguably provide merely a framework – it's in a raucous live environment that they truly come to life.

It's a far cry from the last 18 months for most of us, and while many of his peers have spent the pandemic reinventing themselves online, social-media-shy Guthrie Govan has been quiet. But that doesn't mean he's been resting on his laurels.

A live album captures a particular moment in time. Are you able to listen back to your performances and enjoy them or do you tend to critique them?

"My inner perfectionist immediately starts to scan for flaws whenever I hear my own playing. But the more distance I can get from a recording, the easier it becomes for me to listen from a healthier bigger-picture perspective. Naturally, I found myself wincing at all kinds of tiny guitar details when The Aristocrats were comparing live performance alternatives for the songs featured on *Freeze!* but when the iTunes shuffle mode recently decided to surprise me with that album, I found myself rather enjoying it! It's important to find a balance: if you always hate what you do, music will eventually become an exhaustingly joyless endeavour, while never finding fault in your own playing will leave you with no motivation to keep progressing."

"I JUST CAN'T GET EXCITED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF MAKING GUITAR-CENTRIC VIDEOS OF MYSELF FOR A LIVING"

How do you prepare for a tour when the performances are so improvised and free-flowing?

"You can't 'prepare' meticulously for an intentionally unpredictable musical scenario like that but we work on the premise that you shouldn't really need to if all the players involved are sufficiently compatible. I think The Aristocrats are very fortunate in that we all seem to understand each other on an instinctive level, which greatly reduces the need for planning things in advance. Part of the exhilaration of playing live lies in just trusting the band's natural chemistry whenever one of us takes a spontaneous risk and the others need to react in real time. We'll always try to learn the new songs properly before any tour begins, of course… then we'll rehearse maybe once and, after that, we're just 'using the Force' as best we can."

You're quite an introverted person, and you're really not on social media, but your love of playing live contrasts quite a lot with that. Given that you could probably continue your career online without ever stepping on stage in the modern age, why do you think you have that urge to subject yourself to an audience?

"I acknowledge the apparent paradox lurking in there, but I think a person's comfort level at any given moment is informed as much by environment as by personality type. I've met people who seem totally at ease in large social gatherings but would be horrified by the prospect of hopping up on stage at a blues jam. Perhaps I'm just wired with the reverse polarity, as I genuinely feel more comfortable when I'm playing. Also, when I'm on stage – and forgive me if this sounds too pretentious – I somehow feel more like a conduit for something, so I suppose I'm perceiving that 'something', rather than myself, as the real centre of attention.

"With regard to being an 'online guitarist', I have certainly dabbled in that world and I can't deny that the YouTube stuff has boosted my profile at least as much as anything else I've ever done. But that's all pretty far removed from what originally attracted me to the idea of becoming a professional musician. I salute anyone who has embraced that model and made it work for them but, personally, for me, a huge part of the actual 'being-a-guitarist' experience is the element of playing with (and for!) other people. While I do of course understand the concept of moving with the times, I just can't get excited about the prospect of making guitar-centric videos of myself for a living. Faced with any choice between making my musical activities either more enjoyable or more profitable, I've always been more likely to gravitate towards the former."

Are you a fan of live albums?

"Absolutely! I particularly enjoy the idea of a live recording capturing a truly unique moment – and that goes a little further than simply replicating a bunch of existing album tracks in front of an audience. Obviously, the improvisational nature of a genre like jazz guarantees that every performance will be different but I find it equally gratifying to hear a bold, surprising rearrangement of more composed material. Sting, for instance, will happily use the live format as an opportunity to reinvent his best-known singles and present them in a totally fresh way. If the song is good enough then it should always be able to withstand such treatment.

"The wealth of live Zappa material out there really ticks all of the boxes for me – one minute you're hearing mere humans somehow managing to execute those heavily composed 'impossible' passages and then, all of a sudden, the scene changes and the music finds itself in a totally free-form jam kind of zone. I do love the transitions between those two contrasting modes."

The Aristocrats – Guthrie Govan, Marco Minnemann and Bryan Beller – on stage at the Assembly, Leamington Spa, in 2014

The last time we spoke to you, you were working on a film score for Hans Zimmer. Are you still involved with these projects?

"I'm happy to report that Hans Zimmer's world has been generating some interesting remote-recording assignments during this bizarre period, so I've been contributing to various film scores and embracing the opportunity to explore some different approaches! For instance, working on the *Boss Baby 2* soundtrack led me to become more proficient on fun instruments like banjo, mandolin, ukulele and lap steel. I also contributed a variety of infinitely more disturbing noises to the *Dune* score. That one required quite a few massively multi-tracked E-Bow choirs, plus I randomly decided to install a Gizmotron on one of my fretless guitars, giving rise to an interesting and new sound, which definitely found a home in some of those cues!"

How does Hans work? Are you reading parts or is there a little room to improvise?

"When I'm recording stuff at home, a huge zip file of charts will occasionally arrive in my inbox. On other occasions, the brief might be much more vague and the object of those missions would simply be to find something that sounds right for the music.

"For the live shows, the whole set (with the notable exception of the *Thelma & Louise* theme) basically consists of well-known film scores which originally featured little or no guitar content, so I was free to be 'creative' during the rehearsals. In some cases, that entailed picking out one of the orchestral parts that might particularly benefit from being doubled on guitar. In other cases, an improvised solo or a weird sound effect might be the order of the day."

What kind of input does Hans have on the guitar sounds used?

"I sense that Hans likes the idea of finding people who know their instruments. It would seem that his reasoning is essentially: 'You've spent years of your life immersed in the world of that one particular instrument so you really should have an intimate understanding of what it can do and where it might fit… that could come in very handy.' Generally, everyone in the band is encouraged to suggest things, however crazy they might be, and then of course we can always count on Hans to let us know if he doesn't think the idea works. He truly seems to value input from other musicians. This became a lot of fun for me as soon as I felt fully confident that this really was the nature of the gig."

© Steve Thorne / Redferns via Getty Images

Govan wielding his Charvel Guthrie Govan signature model

Has it given you a different perspective on films and their soundtracks? Do you find yourself silently, unwittingly critiquing film scores now?

"I don't know if I critique them as such but I'm certainly more aware of them now. A little while back, for instance, I was watching a documentary about a submersible exploring the ocean depths somewhere in the Antarctic and it suddenly hit me that I was concentrating more on the music than on David Attenborough's narration, which was slightly concerning!"

Prior to the international lockdown, you were touring a lot with the Hans Zimmer orchestra. We were once told an anecdote by a tutor at the London Guitar Institute who said that, when playing guitar in an orchestra, he once asked the conductor for tips on volume. The conductor replied, "if I can hear you, then you're too loud". What has been your experience of playing guitar in an orchestra?

"I've never actually tried using a real amp in that scenario. I used a Kemper for the past couple of tours with Hans – partially to eliminate any spill issues for the orchestral mics, partially because so many other people in the band (even the cellist) seemed to be using one, and partially because we all had to use IEMs [in-ear monitors], so I wouldn't have been able to revel in the full cranked-stack experience anyhow.

On a related note, I have witnessed a few different orchestras recoiling in horror at soundcheck when they hear the drums for the first time, even when surrounded by plexiglass screens, a DW rock kit evidently makes a much louder noise than they were expecting. Having said that, I recall the fairly recent tale of a viola player suing the Royal Opera House for hearing damage, which was apparently caused by a large brass section during a performance of Wagner's music, so perhaps us hairy rock 'n' roll types aren't the only bad guys?!"

© Cian O'Sullivan • Daniel Work

How else have you been filling in your time during the absence of touring?
"I suppose I've just been taking the opportunity to reassess and fine-tune various little details in the way that I play. In the quest for a tone that actually sounds half-decent at quarantine volume levels, I tried switching my string gauges up to 0.011-.050. This doubtless sounds like an insignificantly tiny change but somehow it made me zoom in on a few aspects of my technique, so I think overall my playing is a little cleaner now and, as a huge bonus, my slide tone sounds much more believable!"

Do you find that legato work can suffer with increased tension? Many players find that a higher tension can make legato sound less fluid?
"Well, settling on a string gauge basically feels like deciding how to distribute the hard work between your two hands so perhaps there's an element of choosing a favourite. My picking hand really likes the stability of heavier strings but, as you say, the legato side of things does become slightly more of a fight. I found that my fretting hand adapted fairly quickly though. For me, the most persistent difference in feel actually manifests itself when I'm adding wide vibrato to a bent note. That feels like a bigger adjustment than remembering to hammer on or pull off a little more assertively.

"I may well revert to 0.010s when I go back on the road. I'm not sure yet. Right now, I'm feeling pretty good about 0.011s but the reality of gigging life is that you're frequently jet-lagged, travel-weary, flu-ridden, mildly food-poisoned or otherwise incapacitated so it's a rare show day when you truly feel like you're physically firing on all cylinders."

The lack of live work over the course of the past 18 months has highlighted the enormous disparity between the revenues earned by streaming services and those earned by the artists that produced the music that's actually featured on those streaming services. Given the inevitable progress towards an all-streaming consumption of music, do you see the financial disparity ever being addressed?
"I would dearly love to be proved wrong but now that the floodgates have fully opened and the streaming providers have attained a kind of critical mass, I fear that it may well be too late for anyone to regulate the system in a way that guarantees more fairness for artists. In theory, the advent of our current pandemic should've presented the streaming services with the perfect opportunity to listen to some of their many critics and perhaps to make some adjustments to their system, for the longer-term benefit of the music industry as a whole.

"Throughout the rise of streaming, we were continually fed the mantra that the recorded music would eventually come to function primarily as a promotional tool but that there was absolutely no cause for alarm because 'artists will still be able to make a living by selling merchandise on the road'. COVID restrictions, of course, totally swept away the fundamental touring framework which that model so clearly requires, which left musicians to deal with the double-whammy of a decimated income from their recorded output and a non-existent income from their non-existent live performances.

"Surely this dire situation should have presented a compelling argument for [Spotify head honcho] billionaire Daniel Ek and his ilk to consider the possibility of injecting just a little more altruism into the business model which has served them so well? And yet, I remember Ek outlining his vision for the future in an interview, about a year ago, and the best he could do was essentially: 'Well, you all need to start churning out more content and engaging more with your fans!' To my way of thinking, such smirking indifference tells us everything we need to know about the priorities of the people who actually wield the power to shape the future of streaming."

Your 2006 solo album *Erotic Cakes* isn't on Spotify. Does that come down to principle or is there another reason that the album isn't available via streaming?
"Somewhat coincidentally, I resigned myself to the inevitable just a couple of weeks ago (prompted partially by the realisation that anyone searching for me on Spotify would only be able to find an EP of me soloing over some backing tracks that had in fact been written and recorded by someone else, which struck me as perhaps not the most accurate representation of what I do.)

Which is to say that *Erotic Cakes* is now available on streaming platforms! All of your noble readers are cordially invited to play it on a constant loop for months on end, with the sound turned down, of course." **G**

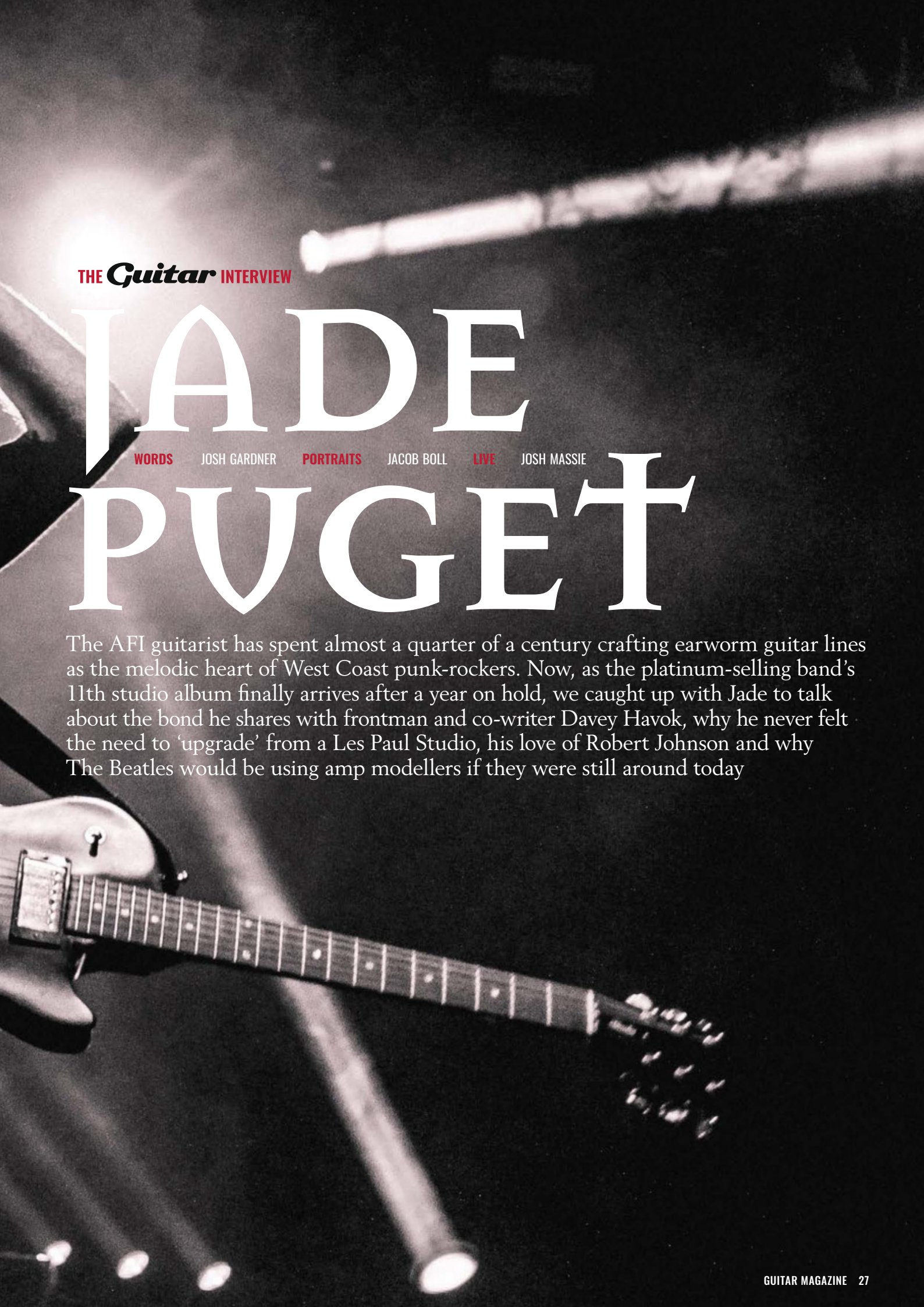
The Aristocrats' *Freeze!* is out now

THE Guitar INTERVIEW

JADE PUGET

WORDS JOSH GARDNER PORTRAITS JACOB BOLL LIVE JOSH MASSIE

The AFI guitarist has spent almost a quarter of a century crafting earworm guitar lines as the melodic heart of West Coast punk-rockers. Now, as the platinum-selling band's 11th studio album finally arrives after a year on hold, we caught up with Jade to talk about the bond he shares with frontman and co-writer Davey Havok, why he never felt the need to 'upgrade' from a Les Paul Studio, his love of Robert Johnson and why The Beatles would be using amp modellers if they were still around today



Jade onstage with a Yamaha Revstar – the guitar has become a frequent alternative sound to his trusted Les Pauls both live and in the studio

It's been a uniquely strange 18 months for all of us, but for musicians especially – having instantly grounded members of a profession more used to spending half the year or more on the road than they are sitting on their sofas at home. For veteran Californian punk-rockers AFI, however, the outbreak of the pandemic presented another dilemma. The four-piece had just put the finishing touches on their 11th studio album but, with the world shutting down, the band knew that there was little chance they'd be able to share it with the band's hugely devoted fanbase in a live setting. Thus, *Bodies* was put on ice in the hope that normalcy would soon return. But they couldn't wait forever.

"We were like, 'Well, we don't want to release this and not be able to tour, so let's just wait and see what happens,'" Jade Puget, the band's guitarist, co-songwriter and producer tells us from his home in California. "And then when it became clear that nothing was going to happen for a while, we just went, 'We gotta put this out!'"

Bodies arrived belatedly in early June 2021. In contrast to 2017's self-titled LP – also known as 'The Blood Album' – which saw Puget and frontman Davey Havok leaning heavily into the post-punk and new-wave sounds that had inspired them as teenagers, the band's 11th full-length (and eighth since Puget joined the band in 1998) is something of a trip down memory lane. Throughout its 11 tracks, you'll find nods to the various sonic territories that the band has explored over their first near-quarter of a century, from the hardcore and spooky punk of their early years to the polished, dramatic and electro-infused sounds that made the band platinum-sellers in the early 2000s.

It will make for a fun listening experience for longtime fans but Puget admits that the effect was totally unintentional.

"I think it's more songwriting ADD in a way," says Puget, with a shrug. "I get bored of writing the same thing and so I kinda jump around and write in all different styles. And luckily Davey will follow me in my musical perambulations, if you will. So it ends up just being a grab-bag of all my influences. And sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not, dude. Sometimes you wanna hear an album like *Nevermind*, where all the songs sound very cohesive, and then sometimes you wanna hear something eclectic. I think we're giving fans eclectic on this one."

BLEED BLACK

Puget's addition to the band will always be regarded as a turning point in the history of AFI, as it coincided with a radical shift in sound from a traditional West Coast hardcore to the majestic, gothic, spooky punk that would propel them to major label stardom. The temptation is to give Puget the credit for that but the truth is altogether more serendipitous.

"It's strange, y'know, before I joined AFI, I wasn't really writing stylistically like that," says Puget. "But when I joined, Davey and I both took this turn at the same time, just by being together. It was strange. One of the reasons we were so successful together as songwriters is that we both recognised something in the other and it dovetailed so perfectly with what we each wanted to do – and it was that sound."

Despite that serendipity, Puget was understandably nervous about joining AFI. "I was a little trepidatious," he says. "This is an established band – I could ruin the band by writing a bunch of terrible songs! On the first day that I got asked to join, we sat down and started writing immediately and stuff started pouring out. The first song we wrote was *Malleus Maleficarum* off of *Black Sails* [*In The Sunset*, 1999]. I had the chorus that I'd already written before, so I was like 'I've got this one chord progression here…' And we just went off and wrote that song straight out, and we were both kind of in awe like, 'Woah! We can do this together. We've never even written a single note together before!' But we never, ever thought about direction – to this day! Y'know, we just sit down and write, and whatever comes out is the direction we're going."

> "The great thing about 'Sing The Sorrow' is that I wasn't scared to try a wacky idea"

Puget and Havok would continue to refine their songwriting chops on 2000's critically acclaimed *The Art Of Drowning* before making the jump to a major label, David Geffen's Dreamworks, in time to craft their masterpiece, *Sing The Sorrow* in 2003. As well as representing a critical and commercial high watermark for the band, *Sing The Sorrow* would be hugely influential on the alternative scene that came after, deftly fusing electronic influences with punk and hardcore in a way rarely seen before but that would go on to become commonplace in the emo scene throughout the decade.

"That was the great thing about that era of AFI, I wasn't scared to do anything," says Puget. "I was ready to try any wacky idea. If I'd thought it was a good idea to have a reggae part in [*STS*'s proto-screamo third track] *Bleed Black*, I would've done that, y'know? Whatever seemed the most creative and cool and interesting thing, I was gonna do. There was this movement at the beginning of the 2000s that was a lot of EDM and future-pop music coming out of mainly Europe, with bands like VNV Nation and Apoptygma Berzerk. Davey and I were heavily listening to a lot of that stuff, so I was happy to be able to get a chance to inject some of that into our music."

CRASH LOVE

Puget's remit in AFI has gradually expanded over the years. As well as contributing synths and keyboards, and handling 50 per cent of the writing, as of *Bodies*, he has taken sole possession of the producer's chair for the first time. Guitar, however, remains his first love and primary musical tool, a relationship that dates back to a bout of childhood illness that would have huge ramifications for him.

"When I was in high school, I got mono, and so I had to stay home from school for like two months," recalls Puget. "I had this old beat-up acoustic and one day I just picked it up and started playing because I had nothing else to do. And in that moment, I realised, 'Wow, I love guitar and I love guitar playing and this is like, this happy accident and this epiphany – I just love to do this.'"

These acoustic beginnings would have an interesting effect on the young Jade's guitar habits, however, causing him to try and reconcile his passion for two seemingly disparate genres.

"At that point I was a punk, I looked like a punk, and I listened to punk music," he says. "But when it came to guitar music, I loved blues – like BB King, Robert Johnson, those were the things that really moved me. And I never really got into the rock-god, y'know, shredder dudes for some reason. Maybe it's because I was into punk a lot but it was the blues guitar players. I'm sure it influenced me. Y'know sitting there as a very novice guitar player trying to figure out Robert Johnson – people still haven't figured out how he did what he did! I'm sure that still filters in a little bit."

He might not have got into the rock-god guitar players but that doesn't mean Jade didn't spend a fair amount of time in the woodshed making sure his chops were up to scratch should he ever need them. Listen to *STS*'s *Dancing Through Misery* to hear Jade break out lightning arpeggios, two-handed tapping, butter-smooth legato and searing rock bends in one frenetic burst of technicality. But it's only ever a fleeting moment.

"I might not have been influenced by shredder guitar players but I do love to shred," says Puget. "Like, sometimes I'll sit at my guitar and just solo for like an hour – it's really fun! And there are several AFI songs where I just let loose on a solo. But if I did it in every song, it would be a little obtrusive and a little boring I think, so I save it."

Jade retains an appreciation for virtuoso playing but prefers watching others play to listening to it or playing that way himself. "There's lots of amazing guitar players and shredder guys and virtuosos out there. I'll watch that stuff because I've always been interested in virtuosity on any instrument. Like Tosin Abasi and people like that – it's fun to watch those guys play but it's just never really been my cup of tea, y'know. If I'm in the car, I'm not going to listen to a guitar solo. But I love to watch them. Last night I was watching some Steve Vai live thing. It's so interesting to watch these guys that are just so proficient in doing these things that, y'know, I don't do."

THE CONDUCTOR

Puget is never less than a live stage performer and it's impossible to picture him pirouetting across the stage without his Gibson Les Paul Studio in his

hands. Gibson's most affordable twin-pickup is often dismissed as an entry-level guitar for the brand but, for Jade, the stripped-back instrument has been a constant friend, almost from the start.

"My dad had a Les Paul Studio, like this beautiful Oxblood Les Paul Studio that he bought and never used," says Puget. "And he gave it to me. So for a first guitar, it was amazing because it was like I was starting off sort of at the top. That really was an important watershed moment for me because I got into my first band and I had a good piece of gear! I wasn't playing some $150 cheap piece-of-crap guitar. And it also started my lifelong love of Les Pauls."

For most players, the Studio is a stepping stone towards buying a 'real' Les Paul. But that's never been the case for Jade. Decades later, the Studio remains his primary live instrument.

"I never even thought like, 'Oh now that I've got a few dollars in the bank I can buy a Standard or I can buy some vintage Les Paul or something,'" he insists. "I was just like, 'Hey! I'll get another Studio!' And y'know, they're nice onstage because they aren't super-heavy. I move around a lot so I can't have a big tank around my neck. So I just stuck to the Studios."

For the guitar sounds on *Bodies*, however, Jade relied on the chambered Gibson Custom 'Cloud 9' Les Paul Standard he's used as his main studio guitar for several years, as well as a Yamaha Revstar and a Schecter Robert Smith UltraCure signature – which marked the first time he's ever used a guitar with a vibrato system on record.

"There's so many tools that I don't want to just limit myself to one thing," he says. "Of course, the Les Paul will always be my go-to guitar but when I've got all these different weapons and all these different tools around me, y'know, I gotta use whatever is appropriate."

If Jade's guitar choices are fairly consistent, then what he puts those guitars through is not. A longtime in-the-box convert, many of Puget's guitar sounds on record are created using plugins and recording software. Traditional, this ain't.

"I think once I got more in-the-box, this whole world opened up," he says enthusiastically. "It's so creative and interesting with guitar if I don't have to just plug in a load of stompboxes and be like, 'Well let's see how I can run this gain pedal into this delay pedal…' Now I can use endless effects that weren't meant for guitar, or weren't meant for anything, and just chain them together. You can get really creative and make sounds that have never been made before because no-one's ever done this with this combination of effects. So that whole thing is really attractive to someone who just loves to write."

Jade is clearly a man who likes to have options on a record. That curiosity is naturally reflected in the dense, layered guitar tracks often heard across AFI records.

"SOMETIMES I WANT AN EPIC STACK OF GUITAR THAT JUST SOUNDS LIKE A WALL OF NOISE"

"Sometimes I'll have four guitar lines going and just run them together," says Puget. "Our mixer was definitely not super-psyched for some of the stacks I gave him to mix! I do try to edit myself, I honestly do," he chuckles. "But I am just an inveterate stacker and I can't help it. I wish I had more powerful self-editing capabilities. But sometimes I just want an epic stack of guitar that just sounds like a wall of noise. Sometimes I realise that something might actually sound bigger or have more clarity if I just had one or two guitar parts but then I'm like, 'Y'know what, this guitar part sounds good… hey this one sounds good too! Let me put one more on there and we're good to go…'"

ABOVE Jade onstage with one of his trusty Les Paul Studios in Houston, 2018

OPPOSITE AFI (L-R) Hunter Burgan, Jade Puget, Davey Havok and Adam Carson

I HEARD A VOICE

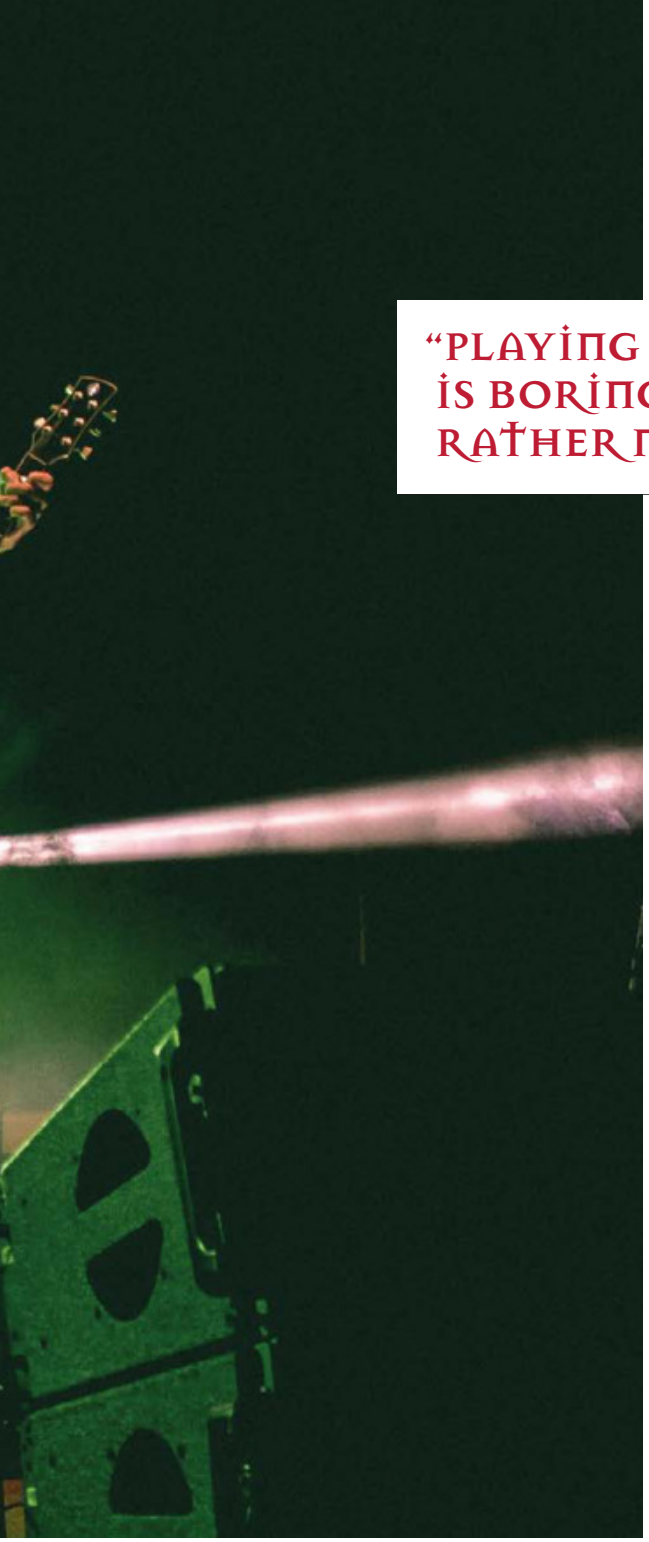
These days it's commonplace for touring bands to have all-digital live setups but Jade was a trailblazer in that regard, using Line 6 PODs for live clean tones back in the days when Fractal, Kemper and Neural DSP had yet to be conceived. It's surprising, then, to learn that in 2021 Jade is a dyed-in-the-wool disciple of tube amps, relying on his trusty Diamond Nitrox amplifiers to provide the punch on stage.

"I've tried the Kemper and I've tried the Fractal, 'cause I always hear people saying like, 'The Edge only uses Kemper now,' or like, 'Woah, man, if that amazing legendary guitar player is using it, then it's gotta be good,'" Jade reflects. "And then I'll try it, and it just will not work for me. I can't get it to sound the same as having a tube amp pushing air from a cab onstage. And maybe it's my failing as a guitar player. Maybe you need to play through those things a certain way or program them a certain way to get them to sound their best. But I always just end up going back to my tube amps. But if The Beatles were starting out today, they would totally be using a Fractal or a Kemper, so would Jimmy Page for that matter. They would be totally using all the newest technology because that's what they were doing in their time – using all the craziest technologies and cutting-edge stuff. I mean, it's just the nature of people that want to get creative with the instrument."

Jade might not be willing to make that same digital jump just yet but there is one exception…

"There's this one sound that I love and that I've used a lot. It's from Guitar Rig, the Native Instruments plugin. I've tried to recreate it live with all these pedals and all these things and I could never get it. So the last tour we did with Smashing Pumpkins, I was like, 'Y'know what, I'm just gonna bring a little laptop and have Guitar Rig with that patch running on the side of the stage, and have a separate line that goes to it so when I want to play that tone, I can just hit a switch and play through that'. So I did, and it was great!"

Aside from rhythm section Hunter Burgan and Adam Carson, Puget is the only person playing an instrument on stage when AFI perform live. Given the myriad guitar parts on AFI's studio output and how common it is for rock bands to use triggered backing tracks to thicken up their live sound, we wonder whether Jade has ever been tempted?



Jade might keep things in the box when it comes to recording, but in a live situation he finds there's no substitute for pushing air

> "PLAYING A STRAIGHT CHORD IS BORING TO ME. I'D MUCH RATHER NOODLE AROUND"

"I kinda take the Beatles approach, where we're gonna do whatever we want to do in the studio and not worry about translating it live," he says. "You can't let your creativity be hampered by worrying about how you're going to translate that to the stage. If there's a big synth part that we can run a backing track to, we do that. We've been doing that for a long time. But as far as guitar goes, I'm not going to pipe in a bunch of pre-recorded guitar tracks to play to, because that's just not my style. I just play like I've always played and it seems to work. I don't think we sound thin on stage. It always translates pretty well."

The fact that it does translate so well is even more impressive given Puget's tendency to rarely play the obvious line when his guitar could instead be providing melodic counterpoint to the vocals.

"I never thought about that but I realise now that I rarely ever play straight chords in a verse," he says. "It's boring to me – it's more fun to noodle around. Without trying to step on the vocal or anything, a little melodic hook is always going to be more interesting to the ear than just motoring through with some palm mutes or something. But I'm still always playing rhythm. I'm playing all the strings all the time and so I sound as big as I can. Even when I'm playing a lead I'll add a drone string, and my leads often have more than one string anyway. It's not like I'm playing way up on the neck on the one string. I've always tried to play as full as I can. I kinda learnt that from listening to Robert Johnson and reading about him, how it sounded like he was two guitar players. I just found a way to translate that idea into how I play, because I knew I was going to be the only guy."

DESPAIR FACTION

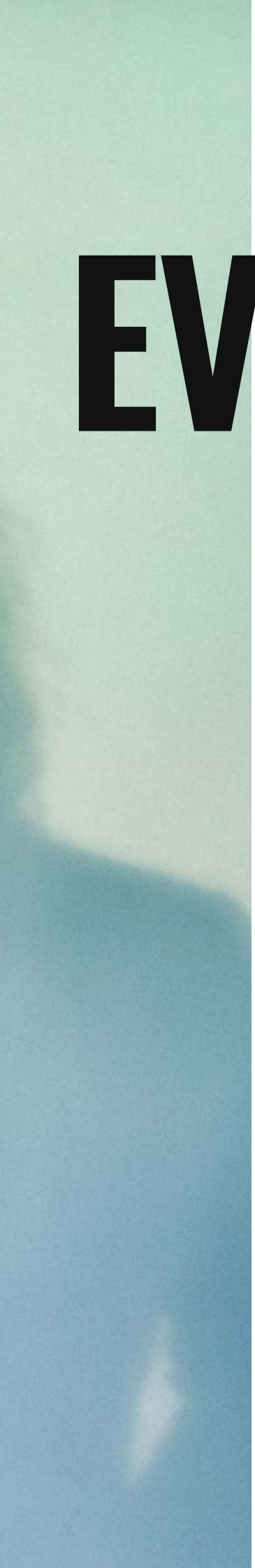
Bodies might have arrived a year later than planned and AFI might still have to wait a while before they can bring the album to fans in the way Jade would like, but the connection between the band and its fanbase remains as strong as ever. And that's quite unusual for bands that exploded into big radio success at the turn of the millennium.

"I think it just goes back to how we started – as a punk band," says Jade of that spirit of fraternity. "We never had any delusions of grandeur or any attempts at glory. We would play and Davey would run off stage after the last song and go to the merch booth and sell T-shirts. And we always mingled with the fans and they were more like friends rather than,y'know, 'You're the fans and we're the band. We're on stage and you're in the crowd.' It was that punk ethos that we came from. That's still part of how I think we approach the fans."

What's next for Jade, a restless musician who has also released five albums with Havok as electronic duo Blaqk Audio? The pandemic gave him the chance to be productive to such an extent that he doesn't even want to tell his bandmates about…

"I've written more than 70 new AFI songs with top lines and everything," he says, putting even the most productive lockdown achievers in the shade. "I've actually been trying not to tell the other guys about it because we haven't even put out this album yet. I don't think they wanna hear about the next album! But to me, I'm already onto the next thing because that's just how I operate. Actually, Davey called me a couple of nights ago and was like, 'Hey! What do you think about, y'know, writing some new Blaqk Audio?' And I'm like, 'Oh yeah, here, I've got, uh, 20 songs…' I'm always just nose-to-the-grindstone – it's just nice to have an outlet for this stuff." G

***Bodies* is out now on Rise Records**



EVERYTHING GOES

In 2017, Dave Keuning decided to step back from The Killers to focus on his solo career. Four years on, and he's found a way to have both: welcoming his second solo LP while returning refreshed to the band he helped propel to stardom. On the way, he learned to write for himself, play small gigs again and finally got to do some tapping…

WORDS HUW BAINES

Dave Keuning's guitar story begins where a lot of guitar stories do: with the monolithic chug of *Smoke On The Water*. As a teenager in Iowa, he sat in a circle with some friends as a Sears catalogue Harmony was passed back and forth in search of the song's unmistakable riff. "We couldn't play, at all," he remembers today, reached over Zoom at his home in San Diego. "I waited patiently and when it was my turn I did not want to let that go."

Back then, Keuning was your classic aspiring rocker. He'd graduated from Michael Jackson and Billy Joel to Aerosmith, Mötley Crüe and AC/DC, with a bit of the Stones on the side. After convincing his buddy to sell him the Sears guitar for 40 bucks, he worked non-stop at learning how to play the thing, developing a riff-based style that could be transposed from the worlds of Joe Perry, Mick Mars and Angus Young to something more outwardly pop.

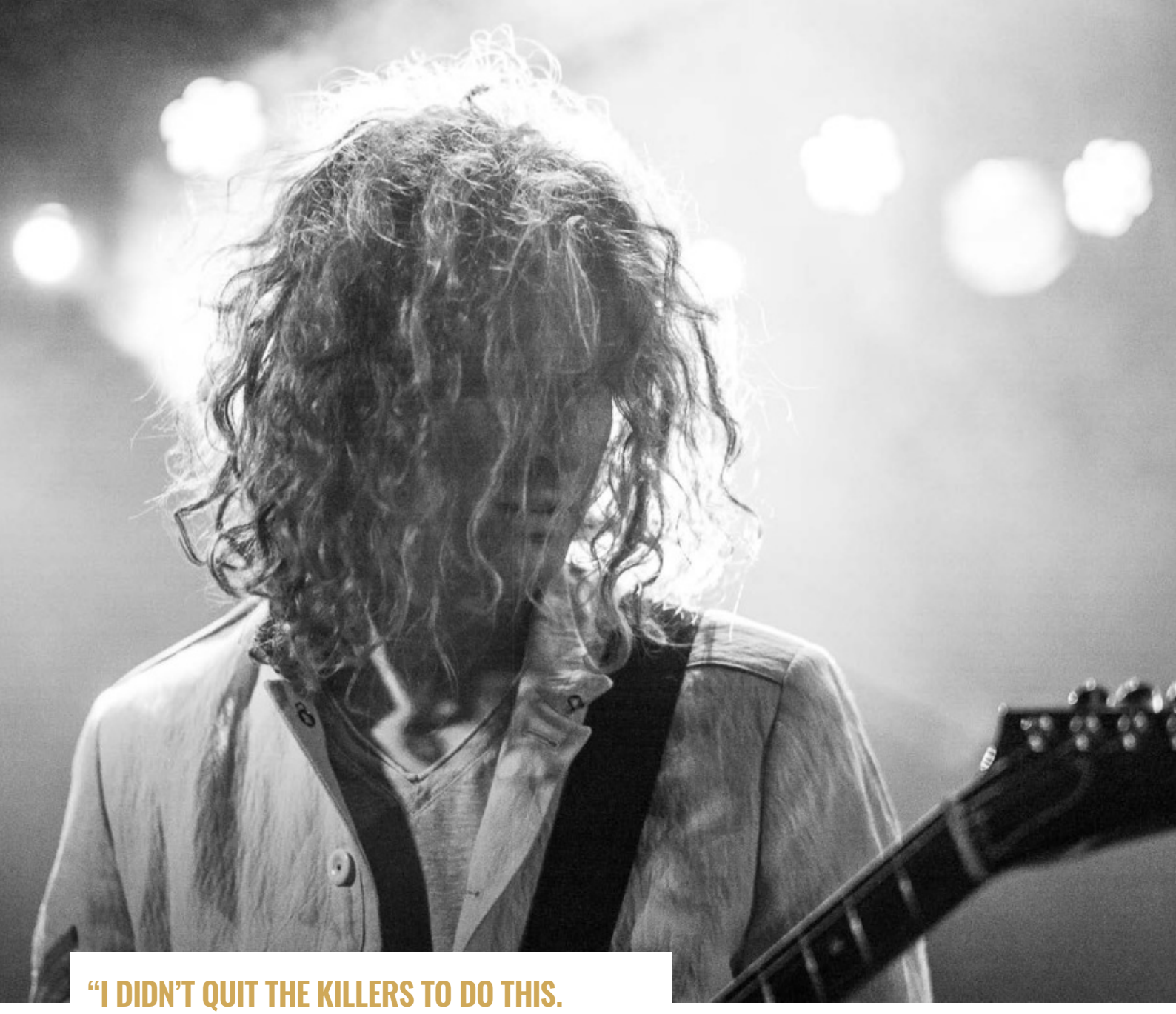
As the guitarist for The Killers, Keuning would use this blend of influences to underpin some of the biggest and most beloved records of the past two decades. His playing – which is hyper-melodic and much showier than it first appears – became a key current in the band, rolling alongside the star wattage and the stadium-shaking hooks of the band's vocalist Brandon Flowers. Keuning's new solo record, *A Mild Case Of Everything*, drills down into each element of his sound, teasing out synthy threads alongside Cars-style power-pop and guitar work that sits neatly next to the solo work of Television's Richard Lloyd.

"I want to have fun with it but I also want the songs to be good," he says. "I really didn't want it to be a record where people would listen to it out of sympathy because they're my friends or whatever. I want them to nod and be surprised like, 'Oh, this is actually good!' That's what my goal was. Since I'm calling all the shots with this, I can play as much guitar as I want, and do some solos. I did my first tapping solo on *No One Is Calling You A Liar*, which is something I've been wanting to do for a long time – a little 1980s fantasy. I was happy to work it into more of a pop song, where it doesn't necessarily belong. I don't think some people even know what it is."

TAPPED OUT

That tapping solo might feel like a little detail but it says a lot about what Keuning is trying to achieve here. The track is a loping synth-pop number that hinges on a chorus that contains a kernel of truth. "There's just so much fire burning through my brain," sings Keuning. It's easy to see *A Mild Case Of Everything* and his 2019 solo bow *Prismism* as a chance to use that fire in a way that feels creatively satisfying on a more personal level. "I have quite a large supply of little ideas," says Keuning, referencing the bank of voice memos that he consulted for the LP's riffs.

The formula behind the record, then, is a surplus of material multiplied by time to assemble the songs on his own terms. But the time element is a thorny one on paper. Keuning decided to step back from touring with The Killers in 2017, around the release of their *Wonderful Wonderful* album, and subsequently sat out the recording of its follow-up, the synth-driven heartland-rock juggernaut *Imploding The Mirage*. Earlier this year, Keuning returned to the studio with the group. In the meantime, though, he has hunkered down to finesse an enjoyably woolly record that's better suited to a dude with empty days stretching into the distance than fuel for a well-oiled rock show.



"I DIDN'T QUIT THE KILLERS TO DO THIS. I JUST HAVE A LOT OF LEFTOVER IDEAS"

OPPOSITE TOP Keuning performing at Atlanta, Georgia's Piedmont Park in 2016

"Some people might be wondering why I did this, because it would seem loco," he says. "I didn't quit The Killers to do this. I just have a lot of leftover ideas. I don't want to say it's for fun, because I take it very seriously and it's something I'm going to do probably for the rest of my life. But I have a lot of extra songs and between the other members of The Killers we all have a lot of ideas. This I have control over. If I really like a song I'm going to see it to the end."

COVID-19 has contributed to Keuning's creative schedule too. "I guess in an unfortunate way I have more time to be creative at home," he says, referencing the pandemic. "I've been saving a lot of these ideas for possible Killers records, and I've worked on a couple [of Killers songs] recently. I think for a while it was just non-stop touring, then recording, then touring, then recording. When I wasn't touring I was just soaking up what little time I had to be home. I feel like I've got a little more time to write."

Another challenge presented by going solo was writing for his voice rather than Flowers'. If Keuning's fretwork has launched a million wedding parties in the past two decades, his voice has had to go from adversary to grudging ally in a much shorter space of time. *A Mild Case Of Everything* is home to a more developed performance and, on songs such as *The Fountain*, Keuning finds a droll, understated melodicism to match his snaking lead lines.

"I was uncomfortable the first time around," he admits. "I almost gave up a couple times. The reason I didn't was because there was no-one else around. I was like, 'Well…' This is really about my songs and wanting to finish them, so I just stepped up to the mic. I had to force myself to do it. I was a lot more comfortable this time. I think playing a few shows really helped. No-one really said anything bad about my vocals, which I guess was my worst fear. I kinda know what I can do a little more. At first, I didn't know what I was capable of singing."

SCHOOL'S OUT

When Keuning left Iowa for Las Vegas 20-odd years ago, it was a sort of half-measure. He couldn't afford Los Angeles but he sure as hell wasn't kicking around closer to home in bands that didn't cut it anymore. He dropped out of school three years into a music major that felt like it was leading to a teaching career

he didn't want, and hit the road with his Ibanez Destroyer, a red mid-90s Strat and an Epiphone SG riding shotgun. About 18 months later, his ad for bandmates was met with a response from Flowers. "We were both getting out of relationships at the same time," Keuning remembers. "We had a lot of time on our hands to start bands."

At their first rehearsal, Keuning handed his new friend a four-track demo cassette that featured the bare bones of *Mr Brightside*, The Killers' first single and a song that, along with going double platinum in the States, has spent more than five years on the UK singles chart. "The very next practice, he came back and he had all the lyrics of what is pretty much sung today," says Keuning. "I was like, 'That's really good!' When the chorus came in we were both so excited for it – we had a good song, we were off and running."

From this point on, Keuning's Destroyer, bought from an old bandmate for $400, continued to play a major role. It underpinned the first Killers record, *Hot Fuss*, and has been a reliable workhorse in the studio since. But a few years back, Keuning relented and, not wanting to lose his friend to a tour-related mishap, invested in a series of Gibson Explorers to serve as understudies. "One of them sounded really good."

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"BILLY CORGAN DOESN'T HAVE MANY PEDALS BECAUSE HE DOESN'T WANT TO LOSE SIGNAL AND THAT'S SOMETHING I'M STRUGGLING WITH. I DO NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE"

That Explorer became Keuning's chief instrument live and an important contributor to recordings. But on *A Mild Case Of Everything*, he branched out further, turning to a collection that allowed him to bring new to the party. "I have a Yamaha Revstar that I used a lot more this time," he says. "It has a unique tone. I have a lot of Gibsons and Fenders. The 335, I used a lot. It's got a great clean sound. I have some Telecasters I used on a lot of stuff. But I wanted a different flavour from Fender or Gibson so I thought I'd give the Yamaha a shot. I like the pickups on it."

Touring as a solo artist has presented an unlikely gear-related issue: fitting his amps on stage. Having headlined Glastonbury and played stadiums around the globe with The Killers, Keuning is rarely one to worry about floor space. But with his go-to Fender Hot Rod DeVille joined out there by a Fender Mustang and a Roland Jazz Chorus on his first tour under his own steam, it got a little tight at times.

"I felt bad on these small stages when I'd want all three amps out there," he says. "But it allows me to sound pretty big, especially if I have the clean going on at the same time as another sound. I try to have less pedals on my solo thing. With The Killers, we have them all in a rack. There were quite a few slowly added over the years because one part would have a specific sound, and we wanted to duplicate that live as best we can. The Killers have a pretty good system to not lose signal. I know Billy Corgan doesn't have many pedals because he doesn't want to lose signal and that's something I'm struggling with. I do notice the difference. This time I just went with a tuner, a volume pedal, a lead pedal, a distortion and a whammy, because that's not easily duplicated."

© Rob Loud / Getty Images

LEFT Keuning wielding his Explorer with The Killers at the British Summer Time festival in London's Hyde Park, 2017

BACK IN THE SADDLE

Hopes are riding high that Keuning will soon be suiting up in megadomes and sports venues again. It was back in January that The Killers posted studio footage to Instagram with Keuning in the room. The group appears to be working at a feverish pace, with August's seventh album *Pressure Machine*, a series of character studies based around Flowers' hometown of Nephi, Utah, set to be followed in short order by another chapter in their story.

"It just felt good to be back involved again," says Keuning. "I've been asked why I didn't do [the last record] but the recording was probably just as time-consuming as the touring, if not more so for *Mirage*. It was usually Utah or Vegas and I couldn't do it with what I had going on. This was like a new beginning for this album, because of COVID, so I just happened to be back and played guitar, helped write a couple of chord changes here and there on songs. That album isn't even out yet and we're planning on writing for the one after it, which I think will be our eighth."

While Keuning describes the unfamiliar dislocation of missing sessions for *Imploding The Mirage* as "out of sight, out of mind" to a certain extent, the response to his hiatus did needle him at times.

"It's frustrating but I understand some of it," he says. "With my favourite bands, I always wanted every band member to be in the band forever. What I don't like is that some people perceive me in a certain way, like I'd complain or that I'm ungrateful. Of course I'm grateful. I'd be crazy not to be. It's a complicated backstory but it's also being put between a rock and a hard place as far as a schedule [goes].We all had different desires for how much we can do without going crazy. Our thresholds are different. It's not a typical way bands are done but I guess every situation is unique." **G**

***A Mild Case Of Everything* is out now on Pretty Faithful**

THE GENIUS OF...

ALL THINGS MUST PASS

BY GEORGE HARRISON

WORDS MICHAEL LEONARD

When The Beatles split in 1970, the question on everyone's lips was whether John Lennon or Paul McCartney would release the finest solo record. The answer to that question, it turned out, was George Harrison. As the 50th anniversary of the quiet Beatle's masterwork is celebrated with a variety of special editions, we look back at this remarkable album and the genius behind it

It's Always The Quiet Ones...

Even in the anarchic annals of rock music, The Beatles' split in 1970 was a messy affair. Paul McCartney was the first to issue a proper press release stating that he was "no longer working with the band", yet the Fab Four would still collaborate under The Beatles brand to complete the *Let It Be* sessions. All four were working on solo records: John, Ringo and George would all contribute to each others', while Paul cut his self-titled solo album on home recording equipment at his St John's Wood home after writing much of it on retreat in Scotland.

Fabs fans barely knew where to look: in autumn 1969, Lennon had declared, "The trouble is we've got too much material. Now that George is writing a lot, we could put out a double album every month". Yet with antagonism rising, this was clearly not going to happen. McCartney would later argue that a wholly shared Beatles "wasn't the right balance" and was "too democratic for its own good".

When the serious rancour became clear, it was assumed that Lennon versus McCartney would be the narrative. But it turned out that it was George Harrison who actually had the most to say…

Diversions With Dylan... To Life Beyond The Beatles

The roots of *All Things Must Pass* were planted when Harrison, while staying in Woodstock in November 1968, established his long-lasting friendship with Bob Dylan. The two wrote *I'd Have You Anytime* together and, although Harrison's solo songwriting was starting to flourish in The Beatles, it seemed the involvement and blessing of a figure as legendary as Dylan had validated George's efforts. He was quickly stockpiling songs. He had even tried to get the other Beatles interested in *All Things Must Pass*, *Hear Me Lord* and the beautiful *Let It Down* during rehearsals for the proposed *Get Back* album (later finished and released as *Let It Be*) but, perhaps thankfully, the other Fabs didn't see them as "Beatles songs".

Or it seems that Paul McCartney, specifically, didn't see them as Beatles songs, as John Lennon soon stated he was more than happy with more George. Whatever. The foursome *did* all approve of *Old Brown Shoe* and *Something*, as we know. But they passed on even attempting *All Things Must Pass*. Perhaps the double-meaning – a musing on the transient nature of existence that doubled as a commentary on the fracturing band – touched something of a raw nerve.

It was, possibly in frustration as much as anything, that Harrison played Phil Spector his extensive demos in early 1970. Back then, Spector was simply a celebrated if reclusive record producer who had not yet earned the ire of Beatles fans for his overdubs and arrangement changes on the posthumous *Let It Be*, nor that of society in general for his future criminal acts.

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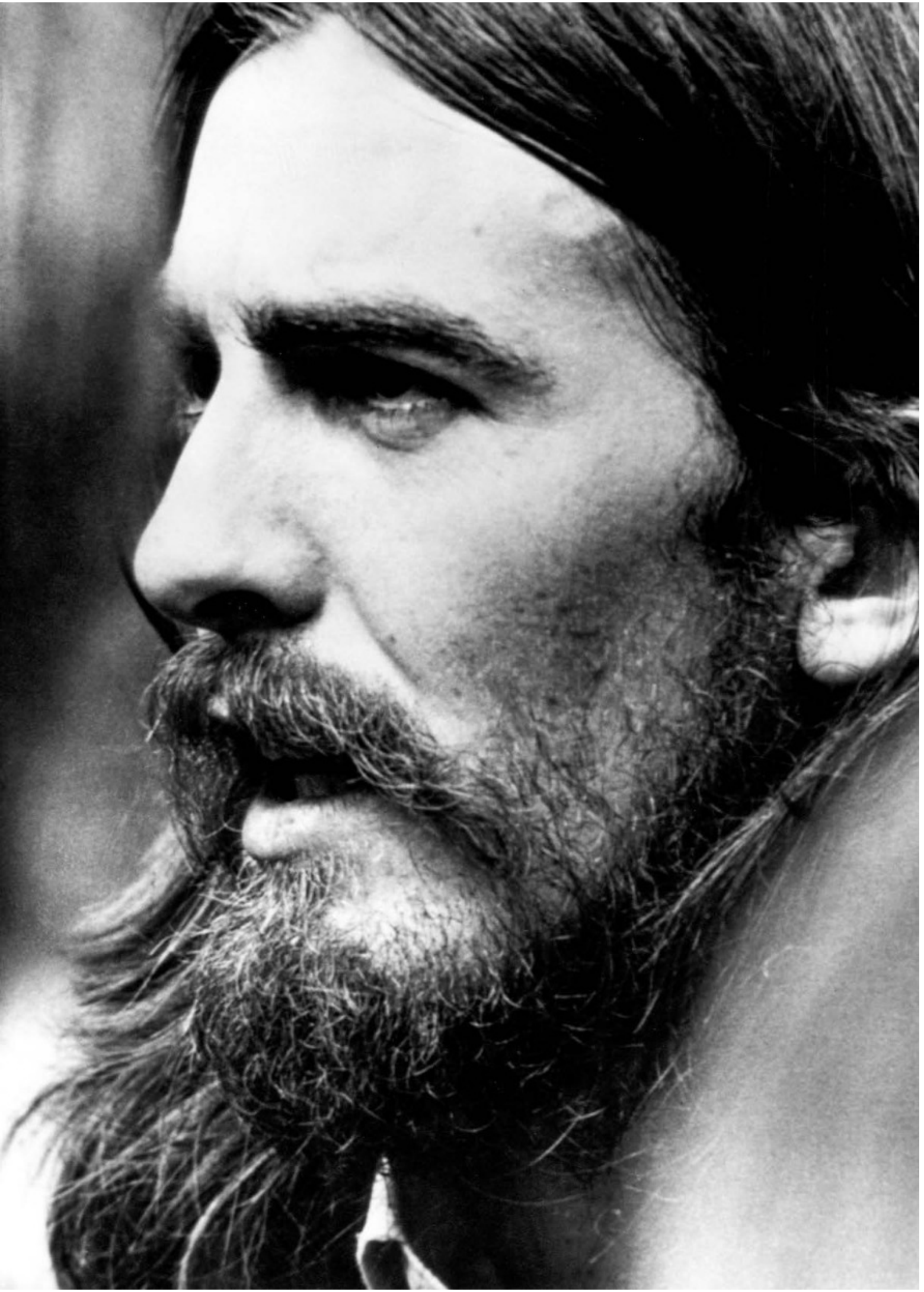

Maybe Harrison simply thought Spector was a conduit for moving forward. In Camp Beatles, all things were passing rather quickly. At a January 1970 lunch to discuss work on *Get Back* (aka *Let It Be*), rows erupted: Harrison was frustrated at what he saw as Lennon's lack of engagement in the project, though Lennon's increasing heroin problems probably explained that.

Ringo Starr later reiterated that Harrison had grown tired of McCartney "dominating" him. George actually announced to his fellow Beatles over lunch that he was leaving – "see you round the clubs" – but was also persuaded to remain to complete the *Get Back* songs.

Filmmaker Peter Jackson's forthcoming *Get Back* rockumentary (due 26 August on Disney+) will attempt to show that the last days of The Beatles weren't *all* disharmony, and may restore some balance. Nonetheless, at the time, Harrison had a clear choice. He was writing with Bob Dylan, he'd established new playing partners via his work with Eric Clapton and Delaney & Bonnie, and Phil Spector was "amazed" at the George songs The Beatles were rejecting. Should he really stick around?

Spector also couldn't believe the sheer number of demos he heard at Harrison's Friar Park home. "It was endless!" the co-producer later recalled. "He had literally hundreds of songs and each one was better than the rest. He had all this emotion built up when it was released to me."

Sure, George could have another torturous meeting with The Beatles, *about* The Beatles, when the rest of the band were already plotting their solo albums anyway. Or…

Come Together

Official sessions for *All Things Must Pass* began in May 1970. As voice, songwriter and a goddamn Beatle, George Harrison was obviously to be the name in lights. But the album boasted an extraordinary supporting cast. This seemed typical of George, for whom friendship and collaboration ruled over everything. An example? To assess whether Jeff Lynne was a suitable co-producer for his 1987 *Cloud Nine* album, the first thing Harrison suggested was a three-week holiday together in Australia. Friendship sealed, only then the album could be made.

For *All Things Must Pass*, George called on his friend Clapton and the other musicians who also played with Delaney & Bonnie, including ex-Traffic guitarist Dave Mason. Clapton wasn't credited for contractual reasons, except on the third disc in the UK, but he's all over *All Things Must Pass*. So are future Derek & The Dominos members (and Delaney & Bonnie sidekicks) Carl Radle, Jim Gordon and Bobby Whitlock.

George and Eric shared women (Pattie Boyd) so, one may joke, why not bands? Other star contributors included Ringo Starr, Billy Preston, an uncredited Peter Frampton, and bassist Klaus Voormann, artist for the cover of The Beatles' *Revolver* and a friend from their Hamburg days. Members of Apple signings Badfinger also played acoustics and helped to create Spector's famed Wall of Sound sonics: on some of the Abbey Road-cut tracks there are as many as five live guitars.

On keyboards, there's also Procol Harum's Gary Brooker and Spooky Tooth's Gary Wright. Harrison had met classical composer/arranger John Barham via his friendship with Ravi Shankar, with the former also playing on Harrison's previous *Wonderwall Music*.

As well as Ringo and future Yes man (and member of the Plastic Ono Band) Alan White on drums, a young pre-Genesis Phil Collins had a bash on some congas (apparently unused), and Cream/Blind Faith's Ginger Baker plays on the jam, *I Remember Jeep*. Harrison even flew Dylan sidekick Pete Drake in from Nashville to play pedal steel. Voormann later said, "You could feel after the first few sessions that it was going to be a great album."

In stark contrast to The Beatles at the end, the recording of *All Things Must Pass* was characterised by collaboration and an all-comers-welcome philosophy. Barham opined that Harrison's preference was always "letting the players find themselves in each song".

That said, in truth, not *everyone* was welcome. When John Lennon and Yoko Ono turned up asking about the record's progress, drummer Alan Wright recalled Harrison's discomfort: "His vibe was icy as he bluntly remarked, 'What are you doing here?' It was a very tense moment…"

Understandable. Not long before, The Beatles had baulked at recording too many Harrison songs. Now they wanted to check he could record them *himself*? Even so, in keeping with the roll-call of (occasionally uncredited) players on *All Things Must Pass*, some believe Lennon actually did play on it – after all, the lyrics to the joke track *It's Johnny's Birthday* include the line, "It's so nice to have you back to be our guest".

Springboard For The 70s

As much as its own cosmic swirl, *All Things Must Pass* served as a signpost for the passing of the 60s and the incoming decade. Harrison's friendship with Dylan had bolstered Bob's decision to make a comeback performance at the Isle of Wight festival in 1969, after his debilitating motorcycle crash of 1966. *Behind That Locked Door*, one of Harrison's most affecting ballads, is actually written *at* Dylan and an ode of support to a new but lasting friendship ("Please forget those teardrops/Let me take them from you"). Dylan returned the favour in 1971, lending weight to Harrison's *The Concert for Bangladesh*, itself often cited as the first-ever big rock benefit show.

The recording together of Clapton and Delaney & Bonnie's backing band laid the foundations for Derek & The Dominos. "We made our bones, really, on that album with George", said Clapton in 1990, saying he and his new American friends had "no game plan" other than living at EC's Surrey house Hurtwood Edge, "getting stoned, and playing and semi-writing songs". *All Things Must Pass* galvanised them. The inspiration even flowed on a micro level: Pete Drake was a pioneer of using a talkbox with his pedal steel and Peter Frampton nicked the idea from the *All Things Must Pass* sessions for his mid-1970s breakthrough *Show Me The Way*.

Then, of course, there were the songs. *My Sweet Lord* was a masterstroke of sacrament-by-stealth songwriting and a landmark in introducing Eastern philosophies into mainstream pop. It also introduced Harrison's signature slide playing. In his book *I Me Mine*, Harrison wrote, "I thought a lot about whether to do *My Sweet Lord* or not, because I would be committing myself publicly and I anticipated that a lot of people might get weird about it… I wanted to show that 'Hallelujah' and 'Hare Krishna' are quite the same thing."

The more solemn *Beware Of Darkness*, though it sounds more portentous, is also a standout. It's based on Harrison's devotion to the Hare Krishna tradition and sees him warning of corrupting con men ("soft shoe shufflers"), politicians ("greedy leaders") and pop idols of little substance ("falling swingers"). It's all wrapped up in a boldly original composition, with its harmonic movement going from the key of C♯m to D major to C major. English musicologist Wilfrid Mellers later noted how it shouldn't work but does because it "creates the 'aimless' wandering of 'each unconscious sufferer'". Far out. As Harrison himself insisted after the epic album's release, "Music should be used for the perception of God, not jitterbugging…"

An older song addressing reincarnation, *Art Of Dying* dated back to 1966. The closest Harrison ever got to hard rock, it's a full-on Spector kitchen-sink production emboldened by sparkling wah soloing by Clapton. How The Beatles came to reject this song – assuming they did – is baffling. Maybe Harrison thought better than to even offer it to them.

OPPOSITE The Beatles were fracturing by the time they played their famous rooftop concert, and within a year all four Fabs were planning solo LPs – including George

ABOVE The encouragement of his friend Bob Dylan spurred Harrison to keep writing his own songs, despite an often lukewarm reception from his fellow Beatles

© Express / Getty Images • Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images

Harrison and Eric Clapton were firm friends and the latter's largely uncredited guitar work sparkles across *All Things Must Pass*

"At that time I thought it was too far out," said Harrison in happier Fabs times. In his *I, Me, Mine* memoir, Harrison later revealed that an early lyric was: "There'll come a time when all of us must leave here, Then nothing Mr Epstein can do will keep me here with you."

Outward-looking and dizzyingly technicolour, *All Things Must Pass* was a stark contrast to the introverted leanings of Lennon and McCartney's first solo efforts. Even the *Apple Jam* blues-rock improvs of sides five and six (in old money) are endlessly listenable and straight-out fun for musos.

The record's gushing creativity even survived troubled times for Harrison: mid-1970 recording was interrupted as he tended to his dying mother, Louise, back in Liverpool. George's mother had always been a rock: she had bought him his first guitar, and her fandom of the *Radio India* programme would help nurture her son's own sensibilities. As Harrison's then-wife Pattie Boyd noted about Louise's death during *All Things Must Pass*, "All she wanted for her children is that they should be happy, and she recognised that nothing made George quite as happy as making music". And death would not stop George.

It's true that some of Spector's production is over-egged at times ("I grew to like it" Harrison pointedly remarked in the 70s: later, he said he "couldn't stand" reverb) and subsequent reissues have tempered some of the mix's bombast. But George essentially self-produced much of the original anyway. Spector's need for copious amounts of brandy to operate at full tilt was, perhaps, a blessing: he didn't get his hands on *everything*. Nor did Clapton's infatuation with Pattie Boyd derail Harrison's righteous path.

Such details and pitfalls are for those who already know this staggering album. The first triple-album ever, an album of spirituality, honesty, wit and simply great ensemble playing, all majestically conducted.

A new mix of the title track was released for its 50th anniversary, with a new mix of the whole thing slated for release by the time you reading this. But in whichever mix flavour, *All Things Must Pass* was a high George Harrison would never reach again. As *Cracked*'s Adam Tod Brown wrote wryly in 2013: "If anyone ever tells you there is a better Beatles solo album than *All Things Must Pass*, congratulations, you've probably just met Paul McCartney."

This was George Harrison, after years of clipped wings, now free as a bird. **G**

George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass 50th Anniversary* editions are out now

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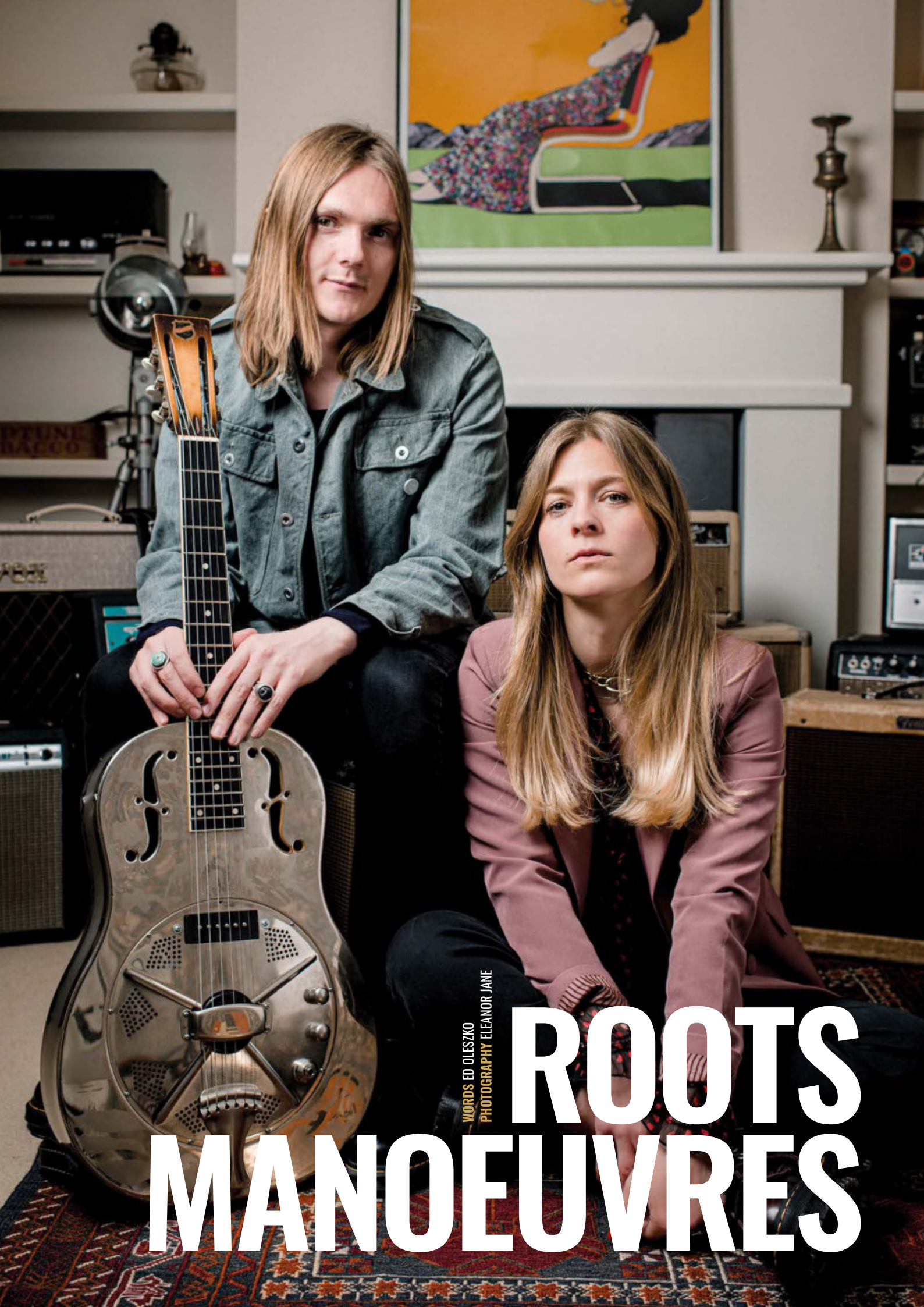


ROOTS MANOEUVRES

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

LEFT Chris says that this Gretsch G6120T-55 Vintage Select Edition '55 Chet Atkins holds its own against genuine vintage instruments

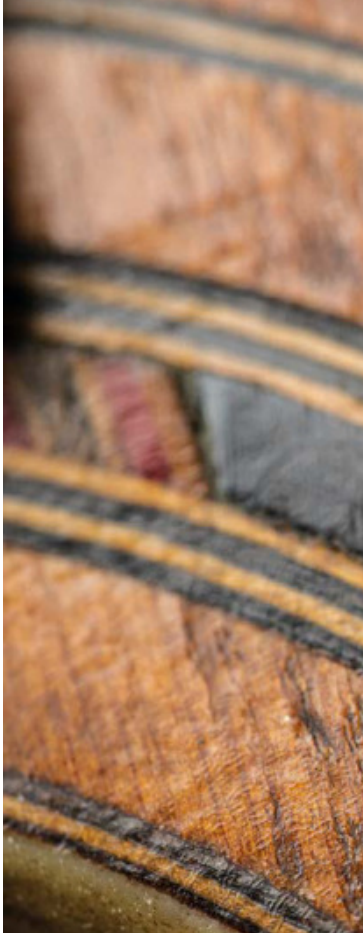
BELOW LEFT This vintage early 1960s Gretsch 6134 Corvette is great for twangy tones with its single HiLo'Tron

BELOW RIGHT The Silvertone 1446L – often referred to as the Chris Isaak – was originally sold through the Sears catalogue, and has Seth Lover-designed mini-humbuckers built by Gibson

Back in the UK after a stint in Nashville, Ida Mae are itching to hit the road again. We sit down with the band's slide-guitar extraordinaire Chris Turpin to check out the jewels in his enviable guitar collection and hear about a lockdown album with some famous special guests

Ida Mae's new album *Click Click Domino* is a true road record. Weaving mournful country harmonies together with layers of slide guitar, vintage roots instruments, old drum machines and modern synthesisers, the husband-and-wife team of Chris Turpin and Stephanie Jean have crafted a wild musical landscape that's as rich in possibilities as the thousands of miles they covered across more than 40 US states while supporting the likes of Marcus King, Greta Van Fleet, Willie Nelson and Alison Krauss.

Conceived while out on the road, *Click Click Domino* builds upon the duo's impressive Ethan Johns-produced 2019 debut album *Chasing Lights*.



On Ida Mae's new album *Click Click Domino*, Chris and Stephanie combines guitars and drum machines with traditional American instruments, including this Maybell banjolele and Oscar Schmidt flat-top mandolinetto

Inspired by the backdrop of smalltown USA, the record is drenched in the imagery of barren landscapes, heartbreak, cheap motels and thousands of dusty desert miles in the rear-view mirror. Yet it all began in the UK, with the pair first meeting while studying music at Bath Spa University in the early 2000s and going on to form the alt-rock quartet Kill It Kid. Record deals and critical acclaim followed. But by 2015, it was all over.

In the aftermath of Kill It Kid, vocalist and guitarist Chris and multi-instrumentalist Stephanie soon formed Ida Mae and relocated to Nashville in support of a much simpler remit.

"When we started Ida Mae, we always wanted it to be a very pure project," says Chris. "Simple guitar, good songs and vocals, stripped back from the excesses of a traditional rock band. This record we self-produced out of necessity but feel it's a very honest document of our last few years on the road."

ABOVE Gretsch Vintage Select '53 Duo Jet is strung up with flatwounds for extra vintage flavour

OPPOSITE TOP Chris's early 1965 L Series Jazzmaster has a buzz-stop and Mustang bridge but still its sports original frets

OPPOSITE BOTTOM This Trussart has a snakeskin-patterned metal top and a sugar pine body

NASHVILLE SKYLINE

Drawing equal inspiration from the rich well of Chess Records heroes such as Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley, the picking of British folk legends John Martyn and Bert Jansch, and country blues trailblazers Charlie Patton, Fred McDowell and Memphis Minnie, Chris Turpin is a songwriter and guitarist who is richly versed in the instrument's history. Yet he appears unburdened by the pitfalls of pretentiousness and is unafraid to blend rare vintage instruments with modern technology when the need arises.

"We recorded everything but the drums and bass at our home in Nashville during lockdown," he says of the *Click Click Domino* sessions. "Our long-term friend and producer Ethan Johns later added acoustic drums at his home studio, and our bass player Nick Pini added his bass at home too. It's a proper lockdown record in every sense!"

While Ida Mae write and perform primarily as a duo, the new album features some notable musical guests. "Marcus King is a friend of ours and he came over to record some guitar parts on the songs *Click Click Domino* and *Deep River* at our place in Nashville

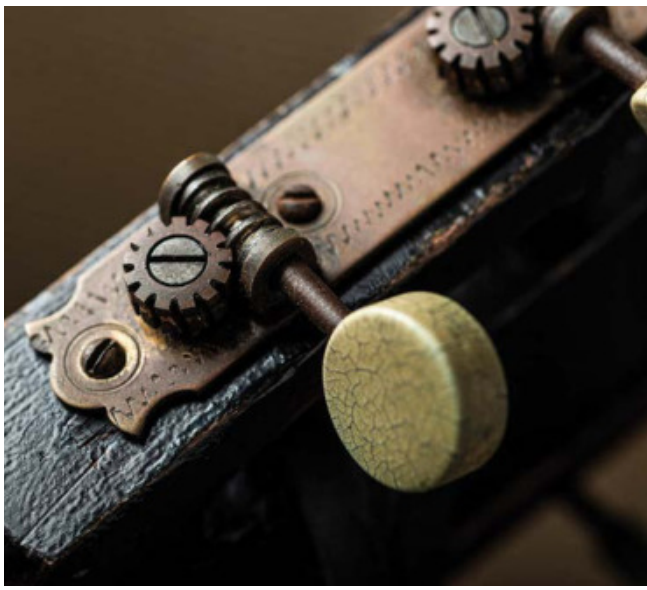
after lockdown had eased a bit," adds Chris. "He used my Gretsch Vintage Select '53 Duo Jet that I string with flatwounds into a 1960 tweed Fender Champ with a Z.Vex Box Of Rock. He just nailed it!"

Picking up the very same Duo Jet for our perusal, Chris reveals that it was also the weapon of choice for another cameo appearance: "Jake Kiszka from Greta Van Fleet also used it for some parts he played on the songs *Long Gone* and *Heartworn*, again through the tweed Champ."

The guitar, as it turns out, is all over the record. "The main riff on the song *Click Click Domino* is the Duo Jet through some funky effects," says Chris. "Gretsch were great in getting this guitar to me a few years back, along with this stunning 6120 [G6120T-55 Vintage Select Edition '55 Chet Atkins], which I also string up with flatwounds. Thanks, Gretsch! They're both such beautiful guitars that I've compared them to some vintage ones and they definitely hold their own sonically. I really love the sound of the Dynasonic pickups. They are the sound of early Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley, and with flatwounds on it's the sound of those magical early Chess records."

OLD SOULS

Locked down they might have been but the duo were indeed fortunate to have most of their musical equipment and road gear with them in Nashville, and soon set about recording new material in their impromptu home studio. With time to experiment, Chris and Stephanie decided to expand on their previous sound by including a range of new instrumentation. New to them, at least.



Now fitted with an LR Baggs M1 active soundhole pickup, the origins of this parlour-sized Waialae acoustic, which Chris picked up in a shop in Lowestoft, remain a mystery

"We wrote and recorded with some unusual instruments we found during our travels on the road," reveals Chris. "Sonically, we thought that it would be interesting to blend the textures of some vintage American instruments like a banjolele and mandolinetto with our resonators and some vintage 1960s and 1970s drum machines and more modern synths. This Oscar Schmidt flat-top mandolinetto was used to write and record the song *Learn To Love You Better*. I mixed it with some modern plugins and a 1970s drum machine but it works well. The first song on the album, *Road To Avalon*, features a banjolele riff with some synth and Mellotron. Most of the songs were cut in three or four takes, and we wanted to combine these early American instruments with the resonators to give a real unique Americana sound".

Featuring prominently on the record is Chris's National Style O Replicon. "This is my number-one," he. "This guitar I got when we started Ida Mae. We knew we wanted a guitar that was kind of the third member of the band, sonically and visually. I'd always loved resonators. One New Year's Eve a few years back, we were having a party. We'd just been offered a deal with Decca so we had some money coming

in, and I saw on Denmark Street they were having a New Year's Day sale and this came up. We drove down that same day! It's a National Style O, part of their Replicon series, and it's the best-sounding one without a doubt."

Resonators are not without complications when it comes to amplifying them for live audiences, and given that Chris has performed with his National at venues ranging from intimate clubs to huge arena shows, we're curious about his approach.

"We use small amps and have quite a quiet stage volume to help combat feedback issues," he says. "I have pickups in my resonators and this Style O has a National Hot-Plate, which means you don't have to drill the actual guitar, you just screw it on and play. This hotplate is steel and that changes the sound; there's more high harmonic content than the brass one that was on there. It isn't the same as a microphone but they do have a cool sound. I often run them through a small pedalboard-and-amp setup."

Chris's favourite amp is his early 1970s silverface Champ. "It's small and light enough to be taken onboard a plane as hand luggage," he says. "I just put it under the seat in front, and because all these old

This Audition-branded Japanese-built guitar is a catalogue model sold in the UK. Chris found it on eBay 10 years ago. It boasts a trio of Teisco gold foil rubber magnet pickups. It was once smashed on stage and repaired and was even stolen and then returned the following day after a gig

amps were built so well that they just stand up to the road, and are easy to repair if something does go wrong. I can solder and work out what's wrong with something simple like this circuit but a modern PCB complicated amp? I've got no chance!"

Moving back to the Style O, Chris recently installed a new pickup: a Lollar. "I put this in last week," he says. "It's actually a DogEar P-90 that I had to take the cover off to fit. They normally have Telecaster neck pickups in these Hot-Plates but I wanted to try something else. This is the guitar I use constantly on the road. It's essential for our sound.

It's had a life, a few bumps and bruises from the road but it's the best one I own I think. Inspired by Bukka White, I stuck some old American coins on the headstock."

MYSTERY MACHINE

Other notable sonic contributors to *Click Click Domino* include a rather mysterious parlour-sized acoustic labelled "Waialae", which Chris remembers finding back home in England.

"This weird little acoustic I found in Lowestoft, near where we were regularly playing in a local pub," he recalls. "Nobody seems to know much about it and I can't really find out much. It's got Waialae on the headstock, which is a Hawaiian Island. It seems to be made of birch and has an Adirondack spruce top with a huge neck. It might be a Regal or a modified nylon-string or a rare Hawaiian builder but it's a complete mystery. I don't know how it got to England. Maybe it was a serviceman who bought it over, as there were a lot of US airbases near there? I use it live all the time and it weighs nothing, which is a nice change from the resonators!"

The Waialae acoustic has been with Chris all over the world, its neck remaining stable the whole time. "I've not had to do a thing with it," he says. "I have fitted an LR Baggs M1 active soundhole pickup, which gives a really detailed sound but when recording I'll mic it up. You can really hear its natural tone on the song *Calico Coming Down* on the new album. I'd wanted a parlour acoustic for ages, inspired by the playing of John Martyn and Bert Jansch.

ABOVE This etched raw-brass National Style 0 12-string resonator was made for Chris after he approached National with a photo he'd found of a similar 12-string model from the 1930s

LEFT Newly equipped with a Lollar DogEar P-90, this National Style 0 resonator is a real road warrior and features Bukka White-inspired coins stuck to its headstock

'Maple', the crowd-christened Silvertone 1445 Speed Demon, features 'speed bump' pickups and bespoke cowboy art by James Willis on the back

But also Robert Johnson, Rev Gary Davies and that whole style of county blues. Lots of my early guitar playing I got into was this sort of ragtime with the thumb pick, which is still a huge influence today."

SPEED BUMPS

Another electric that features on the record, particularly on the slide parts, is an early 1960s Silvertone 1445 Speed Demon, with cowboy-inspired art painted on the back by renowned Nashville artist James Willis. "I got it when we were touring and took it that night to a gig," says Chris. "We asked the crowd what we should name it and the guitar was christened Maple thereafter! I love the sound of the 'speed bump' pickups. You'll hear the sound of that guitar in the rhythm part of *Long Gone* and *Heartworn*, where I ran it into two amps, the Silverface Champ and a Magnatone 410 from the 60s. I was going for a real early punky sort of tone."

The album's closing track *Has My Midnight Begun* features a rather spectacular-looking golden 12-string resonator, also from the National stable.

"It's a raw-brass 12-string National Style O," says Chris, clearly beaming, before laying down an impromptu country blues tune. "I approached National maybe five years ago after seeing a picture of a 12-string resonator from the 1930s. It's unplated brass and they said that this was the first time they'd etched directly onto the metal. It sounds so big and warm, like a church organ through an amp with the National slimline pickup. It's great! I'll be taking it on tour as soon as we can go."

With a new album to promote and thousands of miles already clocked up, we'd expect nothing less from this hard-working duo. **G**

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HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE GIBSON THINLINE

From Grant Green to Dave Grohl, legendary players in just about every genre have made judicious use of Gibson's thinline hollowbodies and semis. But when manufacturers rely on model numbers rather than names for identification, things can get confusing. Read on for our field guide to the most iconic thinline guitars from Gibson's golden era

WORDS HUW PRICE PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Gibson's ES series is almost as old as the company itself. Originally used to distinguish guitars that were designed to be played in the conventional manner rather than flat on the lap in the Hawaiian style, the ES designation simply meant Electric Spanish. But when contemporary pop, rock and blues players think of Gibson's ES guitars, they're usually thinking of thinline models rather than deep-bodied jazzboxes.

Gibson's reputation as a premium guitar manufacturer was established by its traditional archtops. The company transitioned to making superb solidbodies within an impressively short time frame but, in meeting customer demand for sustain and feedback-resistance while staying true to the Gibson aesthetic, ES thinlines became some of the company's greatest designs. There are plenty to choose from, including outliers such as the Byrdland, ES-350 and various ES-125 models, but here we're confining our focus to the big hitters in Gibson's thinline range.

ES-225

Introduced in 1955, the ES-225T was Gibson's first thinline and could be regarded as a transitional model that connected the deep jazzboxes and the thinline double-cutaways. The first models had a single centrally mounted P-90. Gibson launched a two-pickup version in 1956.

Featuring a hollow laminated-maple body with a bound rosewood fretboard, there were two colour options, sunburst and natural. All the models had a T suffix for 'thinline', with a D added for 'double pickups' and an N for a 'natural finish'. An ES-225TN would, therefore, be a single-pickup version with a natural finish, and a ES-225TDN would be a natural finish with two pickups. The sunburst evolved from tobacco to more of a reddish three-tone 'burst towards the late 1950s.

Some may be put off by the tailpiece, which is an elongated version of the type used on the earliest Les Pauls. But they needn't be, because the strings are top-wrapped, as intended, and it's a truly fantastic-sounding piece of hardware. Models from 1959, the final year of production, feature Gibson's smaller trapeze tailpiece, along with an ABR-1 mounted on a floating rosewood base. The single-pickup models from that year often have a rosewood bridge, which offers less vibrance and sustain.

ES-225s with the earlier bridge arrangement might surprise you with their feedback resistance and ample sustain, which comes in no small part thanks to a thick maple block that's glued under the top between the braces. When you consider that you're getting the same hardware, electronics and neck profile as a pre-1956 Les Paul Goldtop for a fraction of the price, you might conclude that the ES-225 remains a bit of a bargain. But, as ever, before you buy be sure to check that the parts haven't been pilfered to restore or fake more desirable Gibson models.

Gibson thin-body guitars feel just right

Whenever guitar players get to talking about their favorite instrument there's one thing they'll always say: *the feel is right!* And that's just what they've all been saying about Gibson's great new series of thin-body electrics. Yes, every one of these models—each with the Gibson *wonder-thin silhouette*—really does have that certain "feel" to it. And fitting so close and comfortably to your body, it'll let you reach many chords easily you've never played before.* You'll find the slender Gibson neck feels just right in your hand, and it's so easy to finger. That extremely fast, low action will make the strings seem feather-light to your touch. If you haven't done so already, be sure to find out all about this new all-star line of light-weight low-action thin-body Gibsons . . . each model so easy to handle, so easy to play. All have that quick response, balanced tone that always says instantly—Gibson.

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* Especially with Gibson's beautiful, cherry-red ES-355T double cutaway model, you'll reach right down to the very last fret with the greatest of ease (shown here, along with the GA-400 amp, by Gibson artist-enthusiast, Andy Nelson).

DECEMBER, 1958 43

ES-335

It's not the fanciest of Gibson's thinline double-cuts and it wasn't the most expensive in the range either but the ES-335 has proved to be the most popular and collectable of them. Gibson came up with some novel ideas during the Ted McCarty era, with the korina trio (Flying V, Explorer and Moderne) and Reverse Firebird models being the most radical from an aesthetic perspective. But, in many ways, the ES-335 was the most revolutionary of the lot. Indeed, many players consider the ES-335 to be the greatest electric guitar design of all time.

Familiarity may have blunted the impact that the ES-335 must've made in 1958. Gibson successfully adapted its traditional archtop aesthetic using a double-cutaway body outline with a neck set low into the body as on the Les Paul models. But the most innovative feature was only visible through the f-holes.

It could be said that Gibson had revisited Les Paul's original 'log' guitar concept, with a solid block running through the centre of the body and hollow wings. If so, Gibson refined his idea almost beyond recognition here, with a solid maple block between

OPPOSITE, TOP The ES-225T was Gibson's first thinline, and bridged the gap between deep jazzboxes and Gibson's later ES models

ABOVE The ES-335 wasn't the most aesthetically daring model of the Ted McCarty era at Gibson, but it's one of the most important

ABOVE This stunning Blonde '59 ES-330 is a very different beast to a 335, and was recently offered for sale, along with its 1960 sibling seen on the opening pages of this feature, by ATB Guitars (atbguitars.com)

OPPOSITE Johnny Marr with the Smiths in 1984, playing an ES-355 – as evidenced by the bound headstock, gold hardware and ebony 'board

the neck and tail ends that was glued to the bent laminate sides, closely coupled to the front and back with kerfed spruce braces.

With the block being so narrow relative to the body, a significant area of air space was retained, which meant that the front and back were still able to flex. Gibson had created a true semi-solid design, combining some of the sustain and feedback resistance of its Les Pauls with the airiness and acoustic qualities of a hollowbody. The ES-345 and ES-355 models that we'll discuss shortly were constructed in exactly the same way.

Having got the neck angle wrong on the first Goldtop Les Pauls and then rectified the issue, Gibson repeated its mistake with the earliest ES-335s. Once again, the necks were set too shallow and the ABR-1 bridges had to be set almost flat to the body – or even shaved down, making them prone to bending under string pressure – to achieve a playable set-up.

The first ES-335s also had unbound rosewood fretboards, celluloid dot markers and a completely solid centre-block that meant all the controls had to be installed through the f-hole. The necks were pretty chunky and the only finish options were natural and sunburst.

Gibson also used three-ply laminations on the earliest ES-335s, resulting in thinner plates and enhanced body resonance. The apparent downside is that cracks and warps could develop, and Gibson apparently changed to four-ply in late 1958 or early '59. The 1959 model had a slightly slimmed-down but pleasantly full neck profile, and retained the dots and long pickguard that extended beyond the bridge. However, Gibson had addressed the neck-angle issue and started binding the 'board. By now Cherry was offered as a finish option too.

These specifications lasted until late 1960, when Gibson introduced a much slimmer neck profile

© Pete Cronin / Redferns / Getty Images

and its new reflector knobs. The natural finish option ceased in 1961, which coincided with Gibson stamping the serial numbers onto the headstocks. Metal strap buttons replaced white plastic ones and a white plastic switch tip replaced the amber Catalin. The 335's pickguard was also shortened at this time.

The year of 1962 saw some big changes, with blocks replacing the dots, the ABR-1 bridge acquiring a saddle-retaining wire and the rounded 'Mickey Mouse' ears gradually giving way to a more pointed shape. Necks began fattening up again and the bridge saddles transitioned from nickel-plated brass to nylon. The most significant change was the move to patent-number decals on the undersides of the pickups. It happened gradually and it's not unheard of for guitars from this era to have mismatched pairs: one PAF and one patent-number pickup.

In 1965, Gibson swapped the stop tailpiece for a trapeze and began plating the metal parts in chrome rather than nickel. The nut width narrowed from 1 11/16 inch to 1 5/8 inch, and then 1 9/16 inch. Many 1965 guitars have a mash-up of features because Gibson would always use up older parts.

Indian rosewood 'boards replaced Brazilian rosewood in 1966, when the headstock angle also changed from 17 to 14 degrees. The pickguard bevel angle changed too, and the crown inlay shifted lower down the headstock. Witch hat knobs arrived in '67 and, in 1968, the nut width reverted to 1 11/16 inch. During 1969, the f-holes got wider and Gibson began reinforcing the headstock with a volute, though differing accounts have this as a 1970 feature.

Gibson even made a 12-string version of the 335 between 1965 and '69. Besides a slightly different tailpiece and an elongated headstock with a split-diamond inlay, there was little difference between the ES-335TD and ES-335TD-12 during the era.

ES-345 & ES-355

Most of the changes that occurred to the ES-335 also apply to the ES-345 and ES-355. Introduced in 1959, the ES-345 is a fancier version of the ES-335, with white/black/white body binding, double-parallelogram fretboard markers and gold-plated hardware. The most significant points of difference, however, are electronic.

Sharing the ES-335's pickup complement and controls, the ES-345 also boasted the dubious benefits of the Varitone circuit. Some regard it as a tone-sucker and most players prefer the ES-335's simpler arrangement, though it must be said that a handful of blues legends have put it to good use.

In its basic form, the Varitone has a chickenhead knob tied to a six-way switch. This controls a network of five capacitors connected to five 10M resistors and a choke. You get a bypass position plus five notch filters providing scoops at five preset frequencies – almost like a wah pedal with five fixed frequency steps that cut rather than boost.

The ES-345 was designed as a more upmarket version of the 335. This stunning 1963 model, complete with gold hardware and Varitone control, was also recently sold by ATB Guitars

Also introduced in 1959, the ES-355 was Gibson's top-of-the-line semi-solid thinline. It is to the ES-335 what the Les Paul Custom is to the Les Paul Standard, with a headstock featuring multi-layer binding and a fancier inlay, plus an ebony fretboard with pearl blocks and gold hardware. The body binding acquired extra layers too.

A stereo Varitone was an optional upgrade for the ES-345. Stereo came as standard on the ES-355 – with mono wiring as an option. Plenty of manufacturers were chasing the stereo dragon at about that time, despite the fact that very few players were interested and it was arguably fairly pointless. Converting a stereo ES-355 to mono is possible but it's not straightforward.

In 1961, the 355 was lumbered with Gibson's sideways vibrato but some were also fitted with the Lyre Vibrola or a gold-plated Bigsby. All three were options for the ES-335 and the ES-345. When these models were ordered with a Bigsby from the factory, Gibson would cover the stop-tailpiece holes with a black plastic plate etched with 'custom made'.

In 1963, Gibson switched the tuners to ribbed metal-key Klusons, and a walnut finish became available for all three ES double-cuts. Of all the Gibson double-cutaway thinlines, the ES-355 is probably the least popular and collectable despite its associations with the likes of BB King, Johnny Marr, Bernard Butler, Noel Gallagher and others.

ES-330

Although outwardly similar to Gibson's other thinline double-cuts, the ES-330 is a very different beast. The body design is fully hollow, the pickups are P-90 single-coils and, until 1968, the neck joined the body at the 16th rather than the 19th fret.

With a bound neck, trapeze tailpiece, ABR-1 bridge and pearl headstock logo, the ES-330 was

more like a successor to the ES-225 than it was the more down-market ES-125TC and ES-125TCD. The neck is set low into the body, like an ES-335, enabling the fixed bridge to be mounted onto the body with threaded posts. Several of the ES-330's other features mirrored those of the ES-335, with blocks replacing dots by the middle of 1962, and the 'Mickey Mouse' ears becoming more pointed at about the same time. The original black plastic pickup covers also changed to nickel-plated metal that year, with reports of metal-coated plastic covers during the transition.

The 1964 ES-330 models had an orange label under the bass-side f-hole and, from 1965, Gibson fitted chrome-plated hardware rather than nickel. ES-330 neck profiles also followed 335 trends, and witch hat knobs appeared in 1967 and a narrower pickguard bevel in 1968.

Sunburst and cherry finishes are the most common, with the sought-after natural finish on early examples and Sparkling Burgundy being offered between 1967 and 1969. Walnut was introduced in 1968 and there were also Pelham Blue and black examples, with the latter particularly longed for.

No longer regarded as a budget 335, the ES-330 has never been more popular and, given the modern low-volume gig environment, the 330's tendency to feed back has become an asset rather than a practical challenge. With its distinctly hollow woodiness, it's a favourite of Barrie Cadogan and Bernard Butler, who owns one of the ultra-rare black examples.

TRINI LOPEZ

Trini Lopez was a big star during the 1960s. He had hit records, starred on the silver screen and was even signed by Frank Sinatra. However, many of us know Lopez's signature Gibson as the guitar of choice and studio secret weapon for Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl. It would even go on to form the basis of Grohl's own signature Gibson ES-335.

The Trini Lopez Standard model sports distinctive diamond soundholes and split-diamond inlays

Lopez had two Gibson signature models, the deep-bodied Custom/Deluxe and the thinline Standard. For the Standard, Lopez specified an ES-335 body with diamond soundholes, and a neck with a Non-Reverse Firebird headstock and split-diamond 'board markers. Despite being introduced in '64, when 335s came with stop tailpieces as standard, the Standard has a trapeze complete with the type of name plaque that was typical on Gibson's signature jazz models. Colour options were Cherry, Sparkling Burgundy and Pelham Blue, and the electronics were identical to the 335s of that era, with patent-number pickups. Recently reissued, the Trini Lopez Standard is more popular than ever but few were made before the initial run ceased in 1971, and prices for them are shooting up.

Whatever your ES flavour, hopefully this guide will help you find your match – good luck!

Head to Guitar.com for more on vintage Gibson instruments

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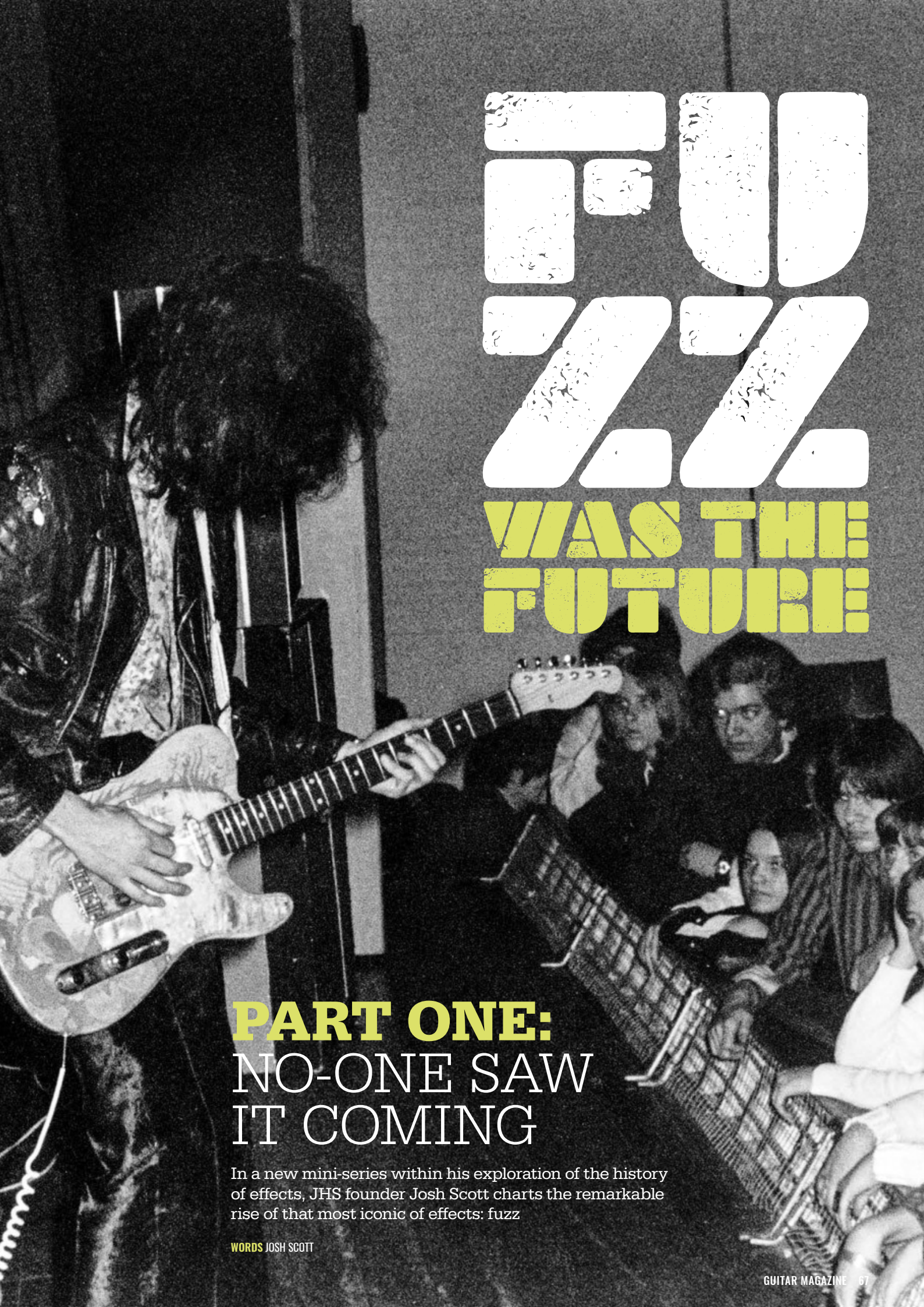


FUZZ WAS THE FUTURE

PART ONE: NO-ONE SAW IT COMING

In a new mini-series within his exploration of the history of effects, JHS founder Josh Scott charts the remarkable rise of that most iconic of effects: fuzz

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

PREVIOUS SPREAD Led Zeppelin performing at Gladsaxe Teen Club in Copenhagen, Denmark, 1969

OPPOSITE The JHS Legends of Fuzz series sees Josh paying homage to this iconic effect

How did we get from the swinging clean guitar of 1940 Charlie Christian to the in-your-face aggression of Jimmy Page on Led Zeppelin's 1969 debut album? If you just said, "A freakin' huge amplifier and some powerchords," then you're not wrong. But there's a little more to it than that. The sound of the guitar evolved slowly through invention, transforming itself into something that literally defied imagination.

Over the past few months, I've shared the endlessly fascinating stories of how our favourite effects came to be after the guitar was first electrified in 1932. The sounds of tremolo, echo, distortion and reverberation gave the guitar a new voice, expanded its vocabulary and helped it to shape the beginnings of dozens of musical genres that we take for granted today. These new guitar sounds were as much evolution as they were invention, as guitar tinkerers and DIY masters used the world around them to expand what a guitar could be and what it could do. If you'll permit me to get all biblical: I believe the first 30 years of the electric guitar can rightly be called its Genesis. Today, we turn to the chapter that might equally be called guitar's Exodus. By 1962, the conditions were perfect and an unexpected accident helped launch guitar to the centre stage of a decade that would change the world. First, though, we have to take a slight detour to rural Alabama, circa 1992.

Life is a highway

Picture it. I'm a 10-year-old kid riding in my dad's 1970 Ford F100 Ranger, which had just had its positively Stone Age eight-track player replaced with a newly installed cassette deck. The burgundy vinyl interior smelled like hot plastic as it cooked in the Alabama summer sun. At the time, I had no particular interest in music. This was the day that something changed in me. It would be a few years before I became obsessed with grunge and alternative-rock albums, spending hours learning from guitar tabs I printed during ninth-grade computer lab. But during that drive in my dad's truck, melody and harmony, for the first time, caught my attention.

Who was the siren that lured me in, you ask? It had to be someone that the kids were into, right? Nirvana? The Cure? No, silly. This was my dad's truck and my dad drinks his tea sweet and has quite literally worn blue jeans every day since I was born. It was *his* favourite singer, Marty Robbins. The 1959 album *Gunfighter Ballads And Trail Songs* jumped from the speakers, full of harmony, melody and a simplicity that appealed to me. Why did a country folk record about outlaws and cowboys catch my ear the way it did? Having had a few decades to mull that over, I've decided that it had to be, as Bob Dylan penned it, a simple twist of fate.

Origin stories

In May of 2018, we filmed the first-ever episode of the experimental project we would call *The JHS Show*. The first episode was called Analog Vs Digital and we were slated to film episode two, The Origin Of Fuzz, the next week. A few days before filming, I woke up to the news that Glenn Snoddy, the co-inventor of the first guitar pedal (the Maestro Fuzz Tone), had died at 96 years old. Don't get me wrong, 96 is a respectable age. But all I could feel in that moment was loss. It was the feeling of knowing that I'd missed an opportunity. I had missed a chance I didn't know I even had. I didn't know Glenn personally. I'd never even met him face to face. But that was the tragedy of it. Here was the origin of fuzz himself, who I could have talked to and asked questions that I was sure no-one had ever asked him. But now he was gone.

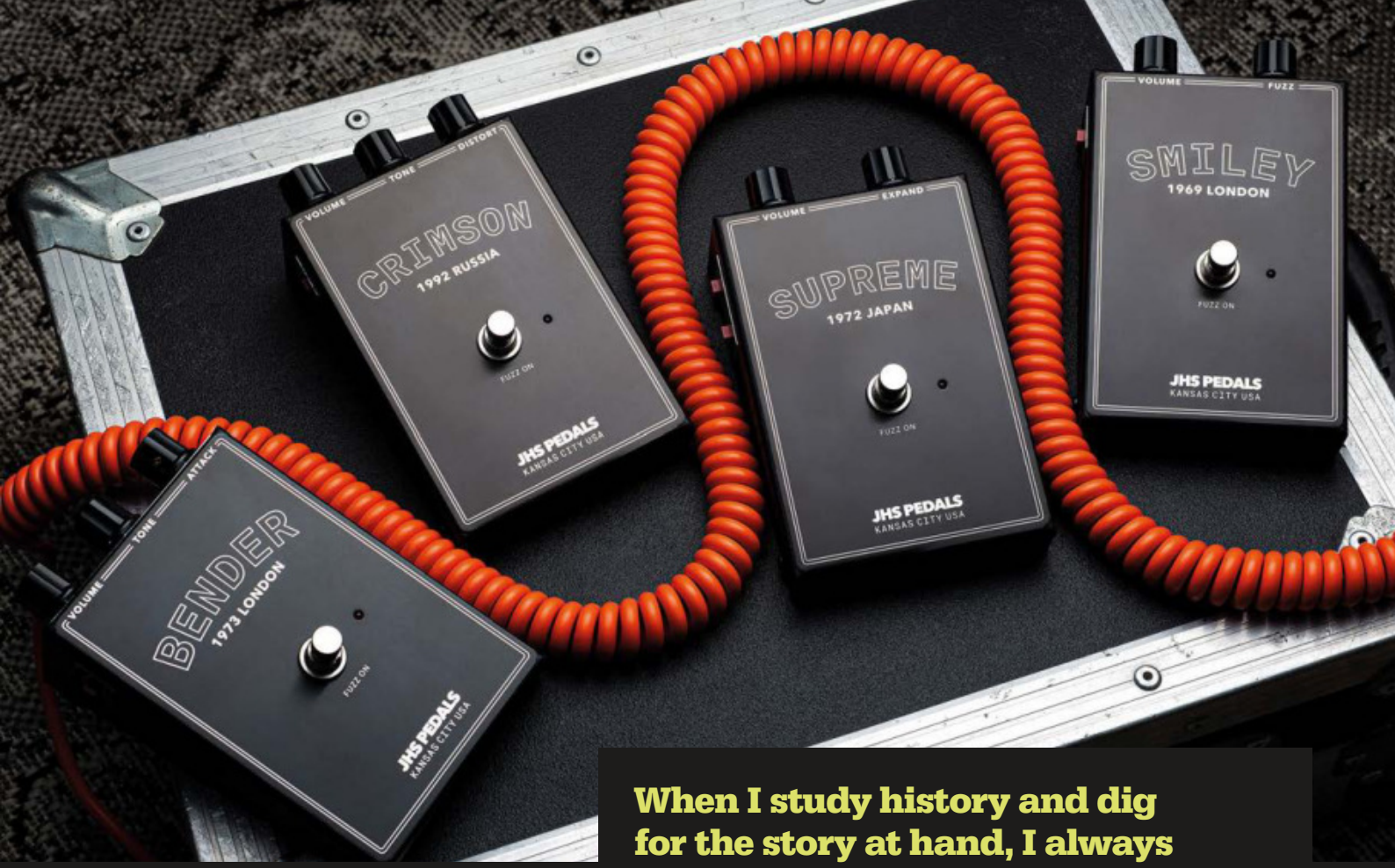
At that moment, I felt a clear directive for what *The JHS Show* would become: I wanted to find the hidden stories and the people in music history whose tales were in danger of being lost, and preserve them for the future of guitar.

So we filmed the Origin of Fuzz episode, I briefly mentioned Glenn's passing in the beginning and aired it as planned. I quickly moved on to the next project but I couldn't shake the Glenn Snoddy story. It became all-consuming. I read a *New York Times* piece on Glenn's life, researched more articles, hunted down family members and friends, watched the NAMM Oral History interview with Glenn and eventually fell down an *Alice In Wonderland*-style rabbit hole all about the story of fuzz.

To this day, my travels across the globe to interview inventors and forerunners in guitar history all lead me back to Glenn Snoddy's invention and his passing in 2018, and even further back to that ride in my dad's truck circa 1992. The story of this accidental fuzz tone is the story of the shot heard around the world.

You see, Glenn was not only the co-inventor of the Maestro Fuzz Tone, the first fuzz pedal and the first guitar pedal ever manufactured, he was there on that *Gunfighter Ballads* cassette tape that my dad picked out of a gas station bargain bin. No, he wasn't shredding guitar or playing an instrument. He was the recording engineer. Glenn took a simple eight-hour recording session in 1959 and made it accessible to a 10-year-old kid in 1992. He took the sounds created in a small backyard studio and helped amplify them through the speakers of my dad's truck, rendering them larger than life. Glenn froze a moment in time and space on magnetic tape. By anyone's definition, that is magic.

That album was a success for Marty Robbins and featured one of the first country western/pop crossover hits, *El Paso*. It was a passion project for Marty and, according to biographer Diane Diekman, he even convinced Columbia Records that a fully Western album was worth the investment, even if it took some elbow grease to do so.



When I study history and dig for the story at hand, I always attempt to recreate the moment as authentically as possible

Marty admitted to Diekman that, at the time, he "had no idea there would be a big market for it". But boy, was there ever. *Gunfighter Ballads* exploded onto the Billboard Charts in 1959, with *El Paso* staying at No.1 on the country charts for seven weeks and peaking at No.1 on the pop chart on Christmas Day. *El Paso* was named Best Country & Western Performance of 1960. The full album was certified gold in 1965 and eventually went platinum. As successful as *Gunfighter Ballads* was, fate and circumstance would collide one year later in that same studio, with many of the same cast and crew. Something happened that day and I believe it deserves to be mentioned alongside footprints on the moon, a homemade airplane rising into the North Carolina sky, and any great event that began as a simple seed of curiosity. It was one of the most beautiful accidents the world has ever seen. It was fuzz.

Cold case

I've spent years of my life in recording studios, whether behind a guitar or at the recording desk engineering and producing, so these details I'm about to explain mean more to me than most. When I study history and dig for the story at hand, I always attempt to recreate the moment as authentically as possible, the music history equivalent of recreating a crime scene to search for clues. The only difference is that, thankfully, we're not dealing with crimes here but rather moments in history that most historians never deemed significant enough to investigate. Think of me as a much taller modern-day Sherlock Holmes, you know, if he was also a supporting member of The Gear Page.

In all of my years of digging though this story, I've never been able to fully recreate the moment when fuzz appeared as an uninvited guest. I can't even prove the exact date of the recording (which irks me more than I can express.) A simple Google search reveals a generally accepted version of events that day but, the more I learn, the more I realise that this version isn't complete.

What I can do is tell you what I believe happened based on years of recording experience, based on my understanding of music and my hours of personal interviews conducted with family members of those involved – and, of course, my intuition. I can confidently say that I've never heard a better version of the whole story and I've never been convinced that it happened differently. My career as a pedal designer and founder of JHS Pedals, my love of guitar's rich history and my obsession with the story of the electric guitar in particular prop themselves up against this one moment. It all starts here. If you want to take this to its ultimate conclusion, I wouldn't be writing this article without this moment in history. In fact, *Guitar Magazine* probably wouldn't exist without it at all. Spooky, right?

Understanding the details of this seemingly simple moment in 1961 are more than important to me. It haunts me. If I was a grizzled FBI agent on '*Fuzz Tone Unclassified*', this case would be the one that got away.

Unfortunately, we have to put a pin in this until the next article, as *Guitar* has officially rejected my heartfelt plea to use this entire issue to tell this story. Join us next time to find out about the *true* story of the birth of fuzz. **G**

Join Josh for more effects adventures at thejhsshow.com

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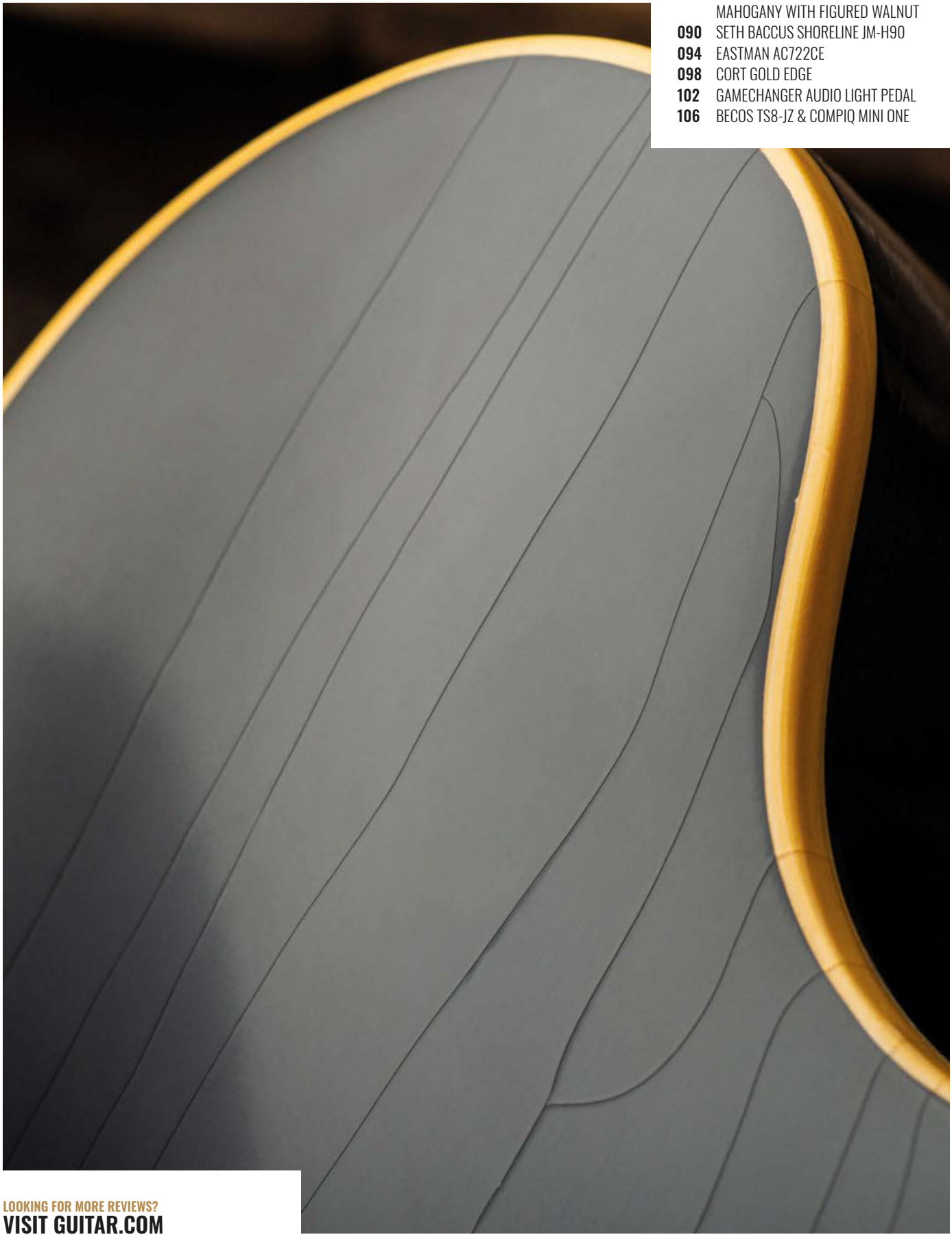

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MADE IN NASHVILLE

GIBSON
MURPHY LAB 1959 ES-335 ULTRA LIGHT AGED, MODERN COLLECTION ES-339 AND ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-335 & ES-345

WORDS HUW PRICE

It may only take three hours to drive from Memphis to Nashville but for Gibson, moving the production of its ES models 200 miles across Tennessee wasn't easy. How do the firm's latest semis stack up?

Gibson's Memphis facility shuttered in early 2019, which meant that its thinline semi and hollowbody guitar production was relocated northeast to the company's main USA manufacturing plant in Nashville. Along with some of the Memphis factory's experienced staff, all of the equipment and tooling made the journey too, including some laminate presses that date back to Gibson's Kalamazoo era.

Bringing everything under one roof has enabled Gibson to give the ES range an overhaul and bring it up to speed with the

updates and improvements made recently across the company's solidbody line. Here, in order to determine how things are working out, we're checking out a cross section of Nashville-made ES models from the Original and Modern Collections, as well as the Custom Shop's Murphy Lab. And what better way to kick things off than with the most compact and accessible member of our fab foursome.

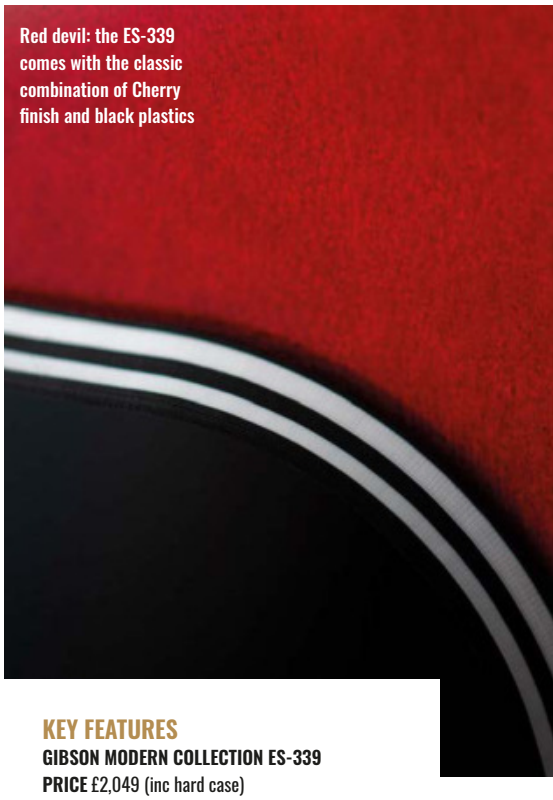
MODERN COLLECTION ES-339

There are few guitarists who don't enjoy the tone of a vintage-style Gibson semi. But there are those players – and this should be whispered in hushed tones when our editor is in earshot – who suggest that the ES-335 isn't, in fact, the perfect electric guitar design. Some might even describe it as a little unwieldy. Highly subjective such notions may be but the ES-339 was designed to appeal to those looking for a more compact take on the ES-335 – and the fact that it has been in continual production since its introduction in 2007 suggests that Gibson's instincts were on the money.

2021's ES-339 immediately brings to mind the phrase 'small but perfectly formed'. All of the regular ES-335 construction characteristics are present, from the three-ply maple/poplar front and back to the spruce braces and mahogany centre block. The pickguard shape and control layout are also identical but Gibson has wisely chosen to shift the jack socket away from the top to the body rim. Consequently, the control spacing is more like that of a regular ES model, or perhaps a Les Paul, than that of a cluttered SG or Firebird. And if you can't imagine enjoying all the goodness that a Gibson semi has to offer without a whammy bar, you'll be pleased to discover

Perfectly formed: the ES-339's body may be downsized but its control layout doesn't feel cramped

In rotation: the ES-339 comes with Grover Rotomatic tuners



Red devil: the ES-339 comes with the classic combination of Cherry finish and black plastics

that the ES-339's body may only be about an inch wider than a Les Paul's but there's still ample room for a Bigsby retrofit.

Given the guitar's dimensions, dots rather than blocks seems like the right choice, and they combine well with the reflector knobs. Hardware includes Grover die-cast tuners with kidney buttons, a wireless ABR-1 bridge and an aluminium stopbar tailpiece. The ES-339 is equipped with a pair of 57 Classic humbuckers, with a regular model in the neck and a Classic Plus in the bridge. The gloss nitrocellulose finish comes in two colours, Cherry Red and Trans Black, and the guitar ships in a velour-lined hard case.

ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-335

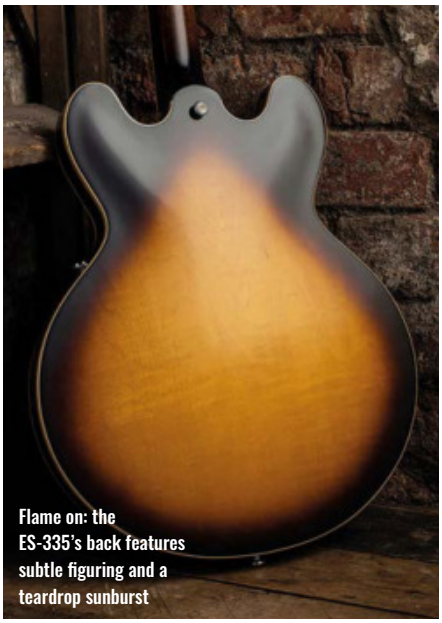
Although it has several old-school features, this latest version of the production-line ES-335 is intended to be more 'in the spirit of' than painstaking reissue. Essentially a very well-made modern interpretation of a classic guitar, the ES-335 illustrates that the new management team at Gibson is now very much on top of the issues that had been bugging customers for way too long. The finish quality is noticeably better – flat rather than fish-eyed – and the binding is back to being an attractive shade of off-white.

This 335's body has 'Mickey Mouse' ears to go with the early-style acrylic dot inlays and keystone tuner buttons. The binding on the rosewood fretboard is a bit thicker than vintage spec, and that thickness is more noticeable because there's no rollover. However, if that bothers you, most luthiers would be able to roll the edges. The binding nibs, meanwhile, have been expertly done.

KEY FEATURES

GIBSON MODERN COLLECTION ES-339
PRICE £2,049 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Laminated maple/poplar body, spruce bracing with maple centre-block, single-ply cream body binding, set mahogany neck, bound rosewood fretboard, acrylic dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners
ELECTRONICS 57 Classic (neck) and 57 Classic Plus (bridge) humbuckers, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.57"/624mm
NECK WIDTH 43.1mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.3mm at first fret, 24.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.22kg/7.09lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Cherry (as reviewed) and Trans Ebony gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT gibson.com

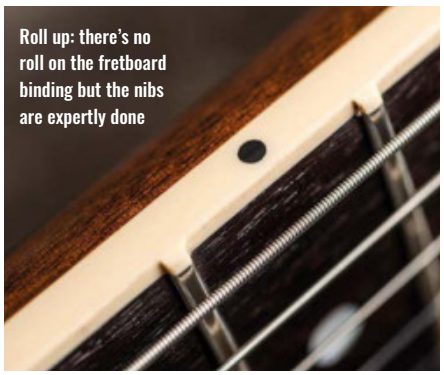
Spirit level: the Original Collection ES-335 aims to capture a vibe rather than a specific model year



Flame on: the ES-335's back features subtle figuring and a teardrop sunburst

KEY FEATURES

GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-335
PRICE £2,599 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Laminated maple/poplar body, spruce bracing with maple centre-block, single-ply cream body binding, set mahogany neck, bound rosewood fretboard, acrylic dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Gibson Vintage Deluxe tuners
ELECTRONICS Calibrated T-Type Rhythm & Lead humbuckers, hand-wired control assembly with orange drop capacitors, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.57"/624mm
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 53.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.5mm at first fret, 24.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.9mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
WEIGHT 3.91kg/8.62lb
FINISH Vintage Burst (as reviewed), Sixties Cherry, Vintage Ebony gloss nitrocellulose



Roll up: there's no roll on the fretboard binding but the nibs are expertly done

Button up: the Original Collection models feature nicely chunky strap buttons

The impressive Vintage Burst finish follows Gibson's classic teardrop shape. The outer layer of maple on the top is plain in appearance but on the back there's a subtle flame. The colours match our 1956 ES-225 closely but, golden era or not, we must admit that the transition areas are much more refined on this new guitar.

A wireless ABR-1 bridge and aluminium stopbar tailpiece combine with hand-wired controls and a set of Gibson's Calibrated T-Type humbucking pickups, more info on which can be found in our interview with Gibson's Mat Koehler on p79. Other details include medium-jumbo fretwire, and the instrument comes with a hard case and a Gibson accessory kit that includes a multi-tool and a polishing cloth. A black leather strap is also among the case candy.

ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-345

Despite their names, there are few distinctions between the ES-335 and ES-345 models featured here. The body shapes follow the same template, though the ES-345's multi-ply body binding means that its ears look a little pointier. But aside from that, the body construction is identical, with three-ply maple/poplar/maple for the front and back, and spruce bracing with a maple centre-block – though the official specifications describe the 345's bracing as quartersawn Adirondack spruce rather than the generic 'spruce' of the ES-335.

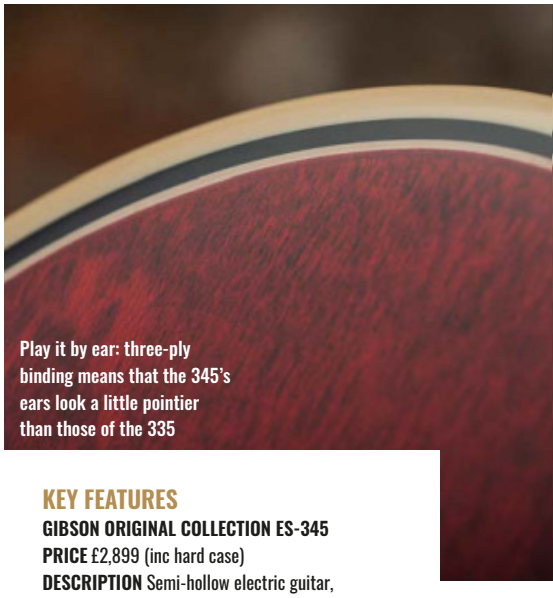
Another point of difference comes in the split parallelogram inlays set into the rosewood 'board – a defining attribute of the ES-345. Perhaps the most famous ES-345 feature, however, has been dropped altogether, as the Varitone circuit is conspicuously absent. ES-345s traditionally have an additional control in the form of a rotary switch with a chickenhead knob wired to a network of capacitors, resistors and a choke. This provides five notch filters set at different frequencies, as well as a bypass mode. Here you only get the bypass mode, because the controls are wired like the stock ES-335.

MURPHY LAB 1959 ES-335 ULTRA LIGHT AGED

Coming from the Murphy Lab in Gibson's Custom Shop, this ES-335 is the most expensive guitar of our quartet by a considerable margin. Brazilian rosewood aside, this is pretty much a no-holds-barred vintage replica that has undergone some light finish distress but is by no means

Cherry picker: the Sixties Cherry finish looks sumptuous on Gibson's Original Collection ES-345

Geared up: the Original Collection guitars wear Gibson's Vintage Deluxe tuners



Play it by ear: three-ply binding means that the 345's ears look a little pointier than those of the 335

beaten up. Rather than the wear patches and gouges you'll find elsewhere in the range, the ageing here is mostly confined to finish checking, and the vintage-style lacquer formula and thermal shock treatment have resulted in elegant, widely spaced lines – which is exactly what we'd expect to see on a well-cared-for vintage model. The lines travel laterally across the back of the neck, which is also a feature characteristic of vintage Gibson semis.

Black is undoubtedly one of the coolest but also one of the scarcest of all ES-335 finishes. Originals exist but they're vanishingly rare, so this is a nice opportunity to get hold of a 335 in a colourway usually reserved for the likes of rockstars and hedge fund managers. Its vintage-style features are not merely cosmetic; the neck has a long tenon joint and it's set into the body with hot hide glue. It also has the sublime late 1950s neck profile that Gibson is now using on its top-end vintage reissues. The Indian rosewood fretboard is also attached with hide glue and the thin binding and fret nibs look superb. Better still, Gibson has rolled the edges of the neck binding so it feels as sumptuous as it looks.

The guitar's other features include vintage-spec tuners with single-line buttons, a nylon nut and a long five-ply pickguard. There's also a vintage-style truss-rod embedded in the one-piece mahogany neck, as well as Bumble Bee paper-in-oil capacitors visible through the treble-side f-hole. The control knobs are the earlier-style bonnet type moulded from butyrate plastic, and Custombucker pickups with alnico III magnets and no wax-potting combine with Switchcraft components and CTS potentiometers. Coming from the Ultra Light end of the Murphy Lab ageing spectrum, the hardware has minimal distress and the plastics none at all.

IN USE

Despite the ES-339's pint-sized body, its neck is anything but dainty. This one has real heft and, in vintage terms, it's somewhere between a 1958 and 1959 C profile. Though rolling the binding might improve things further, straight out of the box this ES-339 is lightweight, well balanced and comfortable to play.

Unplugged, it sounds remarkably similar to the larger-bodied Original Collection instruments. There's not as much air in the tone and the big bodies provide a touch more depth but the ES-339 has tighter lows with extra focus – as well as a little more sustain. Plugged into our test amps – a tweed Fender Deluxe and a Rift Princeton Reverb clone – the ES-339's 57 Classic pickups have a bright, clear and fairly punchy character. For heavier blues and blues-rock tones, they work well, but that comes at the expense of breezier semi-solid tonality. We also find that they muddy up a little when we try to clean things up with the volume controls. With humbuckers that are a bit more vintage in tone (such as the Custombuckers that we're about to try in the Murphy Lab model), we suspect that it would be possible to shift the ES-339's sonic characteristics further towards those of a vintage ES-335 – if that's what you want, of course.

KEY FEATURES

GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-345
PRICE £2,899 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Laminated maple/poplar body, quarter-sawn Adirondack spruce bracing with maple centre-block, 3-ply body binding, set mahogany neck, bound rosewood fretboard, acrylic split-parallelogram inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Gibson Vintage Deluxe tuners
ELECTRONICS Calibrated T-Type Rhythm & Lead humbuckers, hand-wired control assembly with orange drop capacitors, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.57"/624mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 53.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.1mm at first fret, 24.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.9mm at nut, 51.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.01kg/8.84lb
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
FINISH Sixties Cherry (as reviewed), Vintage Burst gloss nitrocellulose

Black magic: vintage ES-335s with black finishes do exist but they are extremely rare

Switch gears: just like the old ones, the Custom Shop instrument features an amber Catalin switch tip

Head of the class: the Murphy Lab model has the vibe of a well-cared-for vintage find

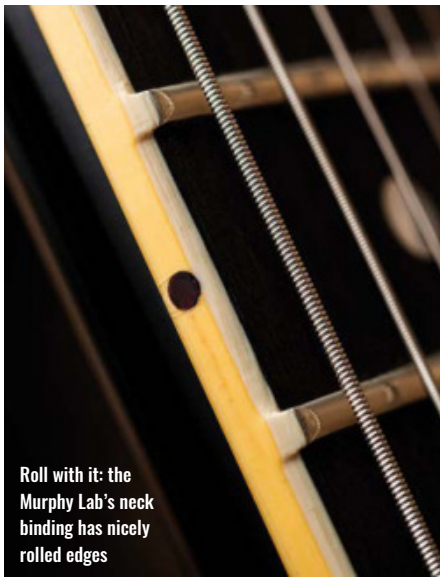
In stock form, the ES-339 is a fun and functional guitar that has solid midrange grind, impressive feedback resistance and nails a particular niche in the market. And if you're a little shorter in stature, another benefit of playing an ES-339 is that it'll make you look like a giant. Or maybe just like your guitar is further away...

We assess the Original Collection ES-335 and ES-345 together because the differences are almost entirely cosmetic. Unplugged, both guitars are bright, clear and exhibit plenty of sustain. Like the 339, these necks are fairly chunky but stop short of being club-like. It's an appealing profile that feels like a 1959/1964 hybrid but again the unrolled binding edges feel like they could do with some breaking in.

The Calibrated T-Type pickups provide plenty of output, with a strong midrange emphasis. They're not as bright as some PAF replicas, and the wound strings can sound a little woolly and indistinct in comparison, but the bridge snarls and the neck possesses a thick and creamy quality. Clean-up clarity is pretty decent but touch sensitivity is in slightly short supply compared to a vintage or Custom Shop example.

Next, we plug in the Murphy Lab ES-335. It's absolutely not a fair fight but it's immediately obvious what we've been missing. The production-line models posses that soft and airy ES-335 chime and the iconic design's familiar attack and sustain qualities. But they simply do not reach the woody depths of this Custom Shop guitar. The slightly hollow and nasal midrange that characterises vintage Gibsons and the best reissues is also here in spades, and the

Check please: the Murphy Lab's Ultra Light ageing means no chips or dents, just elegant checking



Roll with it: the Murphy Lab's neck binding has nicely rolled edges

Age appropriate: the Murphy Lab model features alnico III Custombuckers with lightly aged covers

KEY FEATURES

GIBSON CUSTOM MURPHY LAB 1959 ES-335 ULTRA LIGHT AGED
PRICE £5,099 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Laminated maple/poplar body, spruce bracing with maple centre-block, single-ply cream body binding, long tenon mahogany neck set with hot hide glue, vintage-style truss-rod, bound Indian rosewood fretboard, pearloid dot inlays, 22 authentic medium-jumbo frets, nylon nut
HARDWARE ABR-1 bridge, aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Kluson single-line, single-ring tuners
ELECTRONICS Custombucker alnico III humbuckers (unpotted), 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector, paper-in-oil tone capacitors
SCALE LENGTH 24.57"/624mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.45mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.5mm at nut, 52.1mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.51kg/7.74lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Ebony Ultra Light Aged gloss nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Vintage Natural (also available Ultra Heavy Aged)

Murphy Lab model has such a superb weight and such a freed-up dynamic response that playing it is just like playing a really well-sorted vintage guitar.

Having previously reviewed a brace of Murphy Lab Les Pauls, we would argue that the alnico III Custombuckers are even better suited to this ES-335. Our review guitar is clear without being too bright and exhibits a creamy sustain and a complex midrange. A great ES-335 should cover everything from funk to heavy rock and all points in between – this ticks all of those boxes. We would strongly advise against trying a Murphy Lab instrument if your budget won't stretch to it.

There's no doubt, then, that Gibson Custom is building great ES guitars in Nashville. But the new Gibson Original and Modern Collection instruments are worthy successors to their made-in-Memphis predecessors, and they certainly improve upon the slightly excessive flame and less pronounced top contours of Gibson USA's slightly inelegant Nashville-made ES-335 reissues of the nineties and early 2000s.

There's a £300 price difference between the Original Collection ES-335 and ES-345 models, and all you're really getting for the upcharge is an extra layer of binding on the front and some fancier fretboard inlays, so you'd have to love the aesthetic to consider it. But all three of our standard-line models are well built and nicely finished modern takes on a classic electric guitar design that, in its own way, was even more revolutionary than the Flying V and Explorer, which were launched the same year. The Murphy Lab ES-335 is the one that we'd take to a desert island but, when it comes to our next pub gig, we'd happily throw any of the other three guitars here into the back of the van. *G*

8/10 **GIBSON MODERN COLLECTION ES-339**
A smartly scaled-down design combining solidbody characteristics with hints of semi-solid tone

8/10 **GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-335**
A well-made modern interpretation of the classic ES-335 theme but vintage fans may crave more light and shade

8/10 **GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION ES-345**
Ditto the ES-335 but it's debatable whether the largely aesthetic upgrades here are worth the upcharge

9/10 **GIBSON CUSTOM MURPHY LAB 1959 ES-335 ULTRA LIGHT AGED**
Another triumph from the Murphy Lab that's a joy to play – but it comes at a price

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Eastman T484 **£1,279**
D'Angelico Excel DC Doublecut **£1,399**
Collings I-35 LC Vintage **£5,685**

THE ROAD TO MUSIC CITY

Gibson's senior director of product development Mat Koehler talks us through the move from Memphis to Nashville

How long was the transitional period between the Memphis plant closing and ES production recommencing in Nashville? Were there any logistical challenges?

"It was about two years before we were really back in business with ES models. Bringing them home to Nashville and especially splitting them between Gibson USA and Gibson Custom Shop made sense – and we were fortunate that many of our amazing Memphis employees made the move to Nashville to continue working for Gibson. There were *plenty* of logistical challenges, some of which were just placement of machinery but also trying to get consistency and quality from the original Kalamazoo presses from Memphis – they were on their last legs. We had to re-cut the press plates to get the historic contours. They had worn down significantly over several decades."

What are the main differences between the previous Memphis models and the new Original Collection ES-335 and ES-345 instruments? Were any vintage models used for reference?

"I worked for Gibson Memphis when I started at Gibson, so I have a special fondness for those guitars and for the employees. There were many daily challenges, from leaky roofs to labour shortages, but somehow everyone pulled together to create phenomenal instruments that will stand the test of time. The biggest difference between then and now is that our technological abilities have improved, allowing us to hone in on the specific contours and dimensions of the originals even further. And since the Historic Reissues went to Custom Shop, we were able to use our Historic replica parts, vintage tone circuit, et cetera. The most collectible and distinct years of the vintage original 335/355 models were 1959 (big neck, dot inlays, rounded cutaways), 1961 (slim neck, dot inlays, rounded cutaways), and 1964 (big neck, block inlays, pointed cutaways). We brought in several examples from each of these years to scan with our 3D scanner, and we chose the geometry that we felt best reflected each version."

Tell us about the development of the Calibrated T-Type pickups.

"That was something Jim DeCola was working on. Some of the most musical and underrated Gibson pickups ever made were those made in the late 60s through the 1970s, with the T on the top of the bobbins. Jim remade them as 'T-Type' rather than 'T-Top', since they are covered anyway and we weren't going to remould the bobbins. But otherwise they're the same specs. Alnico V magnets of course. And 'Calibrated' refers to the fact that they are intentionally selected for neck and bridge – slightly underwound neck pickups and slightly overwound bridge pickups. We picked them for the Gibson USA ES models because they sounded too good not to use them!"

The Murphy Lab 1959 ES-335 Ultra Light Aged is a wonderful machine and obviously a different beast to the Original Collection models. By now, you must have seen *that* thread on The Gear Page in which people have reported issues with Ultra Light Aged finishes cracking and chipping – is this a storm in a teacup related to a couple of isolated cases, or was there a wider lacquer issue?

"Definitely a storm in a teacup. I'm not aware of any issues relating to ES models, just a few Les Paul Standards that were ordered with very dark red aniline dye backs… the oversaturation made them a bit more brittle, which made them more susceptible to severe checking when not properly acclimated. We have an acclimation notice on the outside of our boxes. It is *especially* important that our fans and dealers acclimate their instrument in its case when changing climates/temperatures… at least five hours, minimum, as you would with vintage 1950s instruments.

"I used to deal vintage guitars so I've seen it time and time again. I think the majority of cases are just customers not quite accustomed to the behaviour of the vintage lacquer formula. We've got an original Burst and an SG in our Gibson Vault that have some flaking and chipping over the aniline dye as well but the average buyer won't have a lot to compare. In any case, we're making the acclimation notice more prominent in a few different ways and educating our dealers and fans as much as possible."

Are more Murphy Lab ES models on the way? We'd love to see a 330…

"So would I! But we only have so much capacity and demand has been crazy high, so we're sticking with the current ES range until that wanes."

Fender

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN
ST VINCENT GOLDIE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Annie Clark's distinctive and successful signature guitar has spawned a new version with a modified look and new pickups. Has Music Man struck gold again?

There's only one word for this guitar: spectacular. Want a few more? Try 'even prettier than the standard Music Man St Vincent'. This is the Goldie – and it's fair to say our first impressions are *favourable*.

The latest signature model for megastar Annie Clark, this three-pickup solidbody tweaks the radical design of the 2016 original in a number of interesting ways, most notably swapping out its three DiMarzio mini-humbuckers for a new custom-made type with gold foil tops.

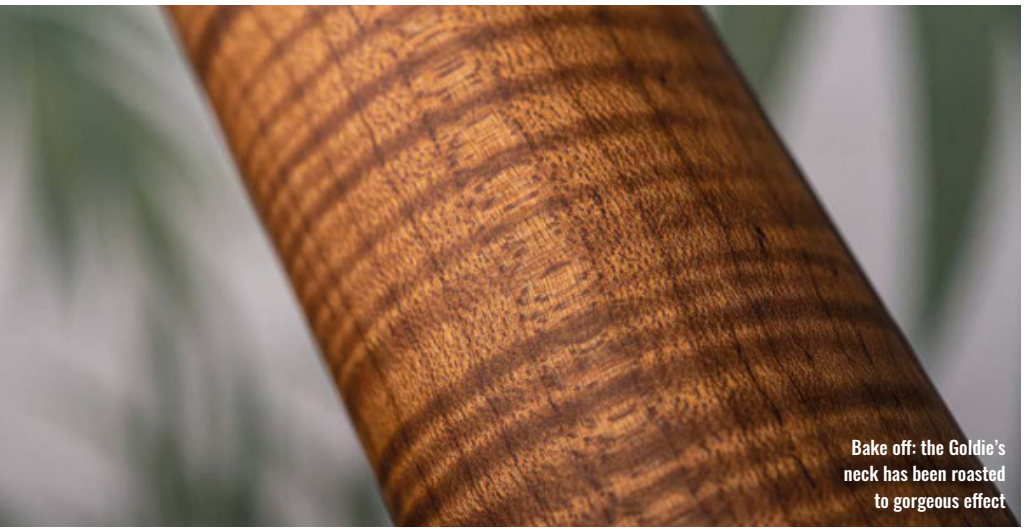
Flip the script: Goldie is the first production MM guitar with a reverse headstock

Lock and load: Schaller locking tuners keep things stable and in tune

That should certainly have a significant effect on the sonics, but there are purely aesthetic changes here too. The most obvious is the scratchplate, which no longer hogs the whole front half of the guitar – a step back towards traditional styling, maybe, but a smart one. The asymmetrical headstock, meanwhile, has been flipped so that you now get only two tuners on the top. Its curves still don't match the hard geometric lines of the body but it does somehow work better upside-down.

That body outline, however, remains a stunning exercise in retro-futurism, seemingly inspired more by Russian suprematist art than by anything so humdrum as the electric guitar archetypes of the 1950s and 1960s. Okay, there's perhaps a hint of Explorer in there, as well as a nod to the angularity of Music Man's own Albert Lee signature range, but this is shaping up to be a classic design in its own right. In fact, possibly the best thing about the St Vincent body style can't always be seen from the front: that arrowhead-like three-plane carve of its top surface, which accentuates the dynamism of the shape while conveniently forming a natural forearm chamfer. Combined with a more conventional belly-carve on the back, it makes this instrument as easy to hold and play as it is to stare longingly at.

Let's get down to the serious stuff, starting with the pickups. Inspired by the gold foils in Annie's old Harmony Bobkat, these new mini-humbuckers promise less



Bake off: the Goldie's neck has been roasted to gorgeous effect

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,599 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in the US
BUILD Okoume body, roasted maple neck with 10" radius rosewood fingerboard (ebony with other finishes), custom St Vincent inlays, 22 high/medium frets and compensated synthetic nut
HARDWARE Custom two-pivot vibrato bridge with brass saddles, Schaller locking tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x Music Man custom gold foil mini-humbucking pickups, master volume and tone, five-way blade pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19.6mm at first fret, 23.1mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 34mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7.1lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Velveteen (as reviewed), Cashmere, Silk Charmeuse
CONTACT music-man.com, stringsandthings.co.uk

Good as gold: the pickups that give Goldie its name are a nod to Clark's Harmony Bobkat

grunt but more top-end clarity than the standard model's DiMarzios. The fact that they look cuter than little rectangular kittens is just a bonus.

A five-way blade controls the pickups, but gone is the esoteric switching layout Clark chose for the original, this time opting for a conventional Strat-style set-up, with master volume and tone. The knobs for each are a stylish cross between a tricorne hat and a cupcake, though the absence of markers might worry keen twiddlers.

As on the original guitar, the bridge is Music Man's own take on a two-pivot Strat type, only this time with solid brass saddles instead of bent steel. The arm clips into place with a reassuring clunk and it all feels beautifully solid.

At the other end of the roasted maple neck, we find Schaller locking tuners and, that rarest of treats, a compensated nut – yes, you can play an E minor and an E major on this guitar without having to decide which one's actually going to be in tune. Luxury!

What don't we like so much? Well, the sudden transition from satin-finished neck to full-gloss headstock at a line beneath the nut looks rather jarring, and that 2+4 tuner arrangement takes a lot of getting used to. Also, despite a nicely contoured five-bolt heel, the lack of a true cutaway means that access to the upper frets can be a stretch.

When it comes to finishes, aside from the deep red Velveteen of our review guitar, your elaborately named options are Cashmere (gold) or Silk Charmeuse (black).

Nut sauce: Goldie's compensated nut is a rare but welcome bonus for tuning

Note that, while red guitars such as ours get rosewood fretboards, the other two colours come with ebony 'boards.

IN USE

You don't have to be a fan of St Vincent's music to appreciate this guitar. As you might expect at this dizzying price, everything about this instrument just reeks of quality – and that includes the tones.

But while we've already touched on the ergonomic advantages of that body shape, let's talk more about playability. The combination of a lightweight okoume body and a moderately thin neck profile suggests a guitar that's been spec'd with smaller players in mind. But it certainly doesn't feel toy-like to those of us with giant tarantula hands. And while the fretboard edges are not the smoothest we've ever grabbed, it's very easy to lose half an hour noodling on this thing before you even remember to plug it in.

You'll be glad when you do plug it in, though. Gold foil pickups tend to be fairly low-output, so in this mini format they can offer a nifty compromise between chunky humbuckers and sparkly single-coils… which is exactly what you're getting here:

Brass section: MM's vibrato system has solid brass saddles

Twist again: the custom knobs add to the guitar's unique styling

Signed, sealed: St Vincent inlays adorn Goldie's rosewood 'board

Lounge act: MM calls this finish Velveteen, echoing the 70s vibe of Clark's latest LP

an array of bright and fresh sounds with pleasing solidity in the low end and vintage twang galore in the mids.

The bridge pup has clearly been wound hotter than the other two to compensate for its position, giving a DC resistance reading of 10.6 ohms compared to the 7.7 of the other two. That stops its clean tones getting too skinny but there's no shortage of chime here – and, if anything, it's even better with overdrive, barking away with controlled aggression and staying impeccably tight in the bass. Flipping to the middle pickup softens the attack and introduces a bit of cluck, making it a natural choice for clean melodic riffing, while the neck unit is smoother but still retains a surprisingly crisp edge – step this way for breezy chords as well as, with a little help from the tone control, sweetly defined lead runs.

Worried about positions two and four due to a 'Strat quack' phobia? Well, there is some of that out-of-phase stuff going on but it's not excessive. Both of these settings go well with a dollop of drive, completing a full suite of five voices that all score equally highly for characterful clarity and tonal balance. Add a divebomb-friendly vibrato that returns to pitch with impressive reliability and the St Vincent Goldie starts to look like another sure-fire smash hit. **G**

9/10 **A uniquely beautiful signature guitar that also happens to play and sound great**

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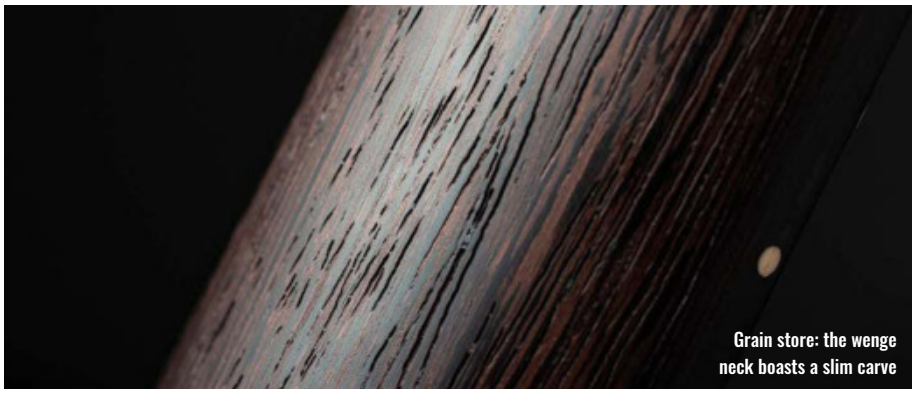
Head start: the MJ's headstock has gold Gotoh tuners



Grain store: the wenge neck boasts a slim carve

CHARVEL
MJ DK24 HSH 2PT E MAHOGANY WITH FIGURED WALNUT

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

A blast from the past but no museum piece, this luxurious shred machine covers an awful lot of ground

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,039 (inc hybrid case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Japan
BUILD Mahogany body with figured walnut top, bolt-on graphite-reinforced wenge neck with 'shredder's cut' heel joint, 12-16" compound radius streaky ebony fingerboard with rolled edges and pearl dot inlays, 24 jumbo frets, Graph Tech Tusq XL nut
HARDWARE Gotoh die-cast locking tuners, Gotoh Custom 510 vibrato bridge
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan Custom Alnico II Pro APH-1N (neck) and Custom Full Shred SH-10B (bridge), Seymour Duncan Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single-coil (middle), 5-way blade pickup selector, 500k EVH Bourns low-friction volume control and no-load tone control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.3mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.6mm at 1st fret, 21.4mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37.3mm at nut, 52.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.72lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Satin natural finish
CONTACT charvel.com

While now built primarily in Mexico and the US, back in the late 1980s, Charvel guitars were manufactured exclusively in Japan. Nowadays, Japanese rock guitars from the golden age of shred are eulogised by a certain breed of player and Charvel's new MJ series, which comprises signature models for YouTuber Rick Graham and shred phenom Guthrie Govan, harkens back to those heady days while showcasing the evolution of rock guitar.

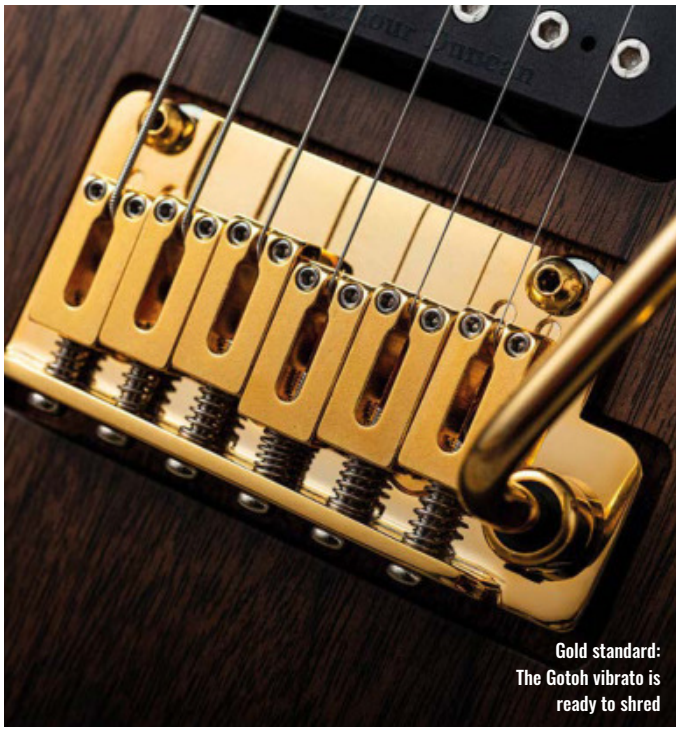
Thankfully, there's no pointy headstock here. But the MJ's huge jumbo frets bring back memories of shred guitars from the days before grunge's meteor strike spelled the end for the hair metal megafauna. Unusually for Charvel, however, the neck is made of wenge and has a hand-rubbed oil finish and slim C-carve similar to that Guthrie Govan model. Also notable is the neck's graphite reinforcement that helps to keep it straight and stable whatever the climate – though should it need a tweak, there's an adjustment wheel located at the bottom of the fretboard for easy access.

Back in the day, Floyd Rose vibratos were practically standard-issue on guitars such as this one. These days though, a Floyd is no longer a must-have appointment – but whammy-bar addicts fear not. The much-vaunted stability and subtle response of our review guitar's Gotoh locking tuners ensures that our double-locking friend is not missed, while a neatly carved vibrato recess allows a generous upwards pull of the bar.

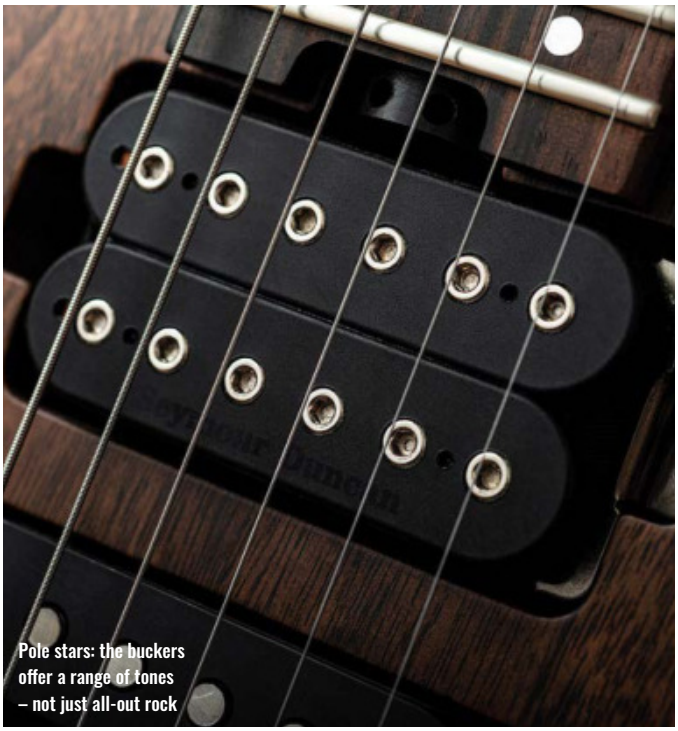
IN USE

The reinforced neck brings with it a slightly increased string tension, which means that our freshly installed 0.010-gauge string set feels heavier due to the reduced flex in the neck. After 15 minutes, that sensation of tautness begins to evaporate but the factory fitted 0.09s were probably a better fit.

A cut above: the 'shredder's cut' heel gives excellent upper-fret access



Gold standard: The Gotoh vibrato is ready to shred



Pole stars: the buckers offer a range of tones – not just all-out rock

Plugged into a Marshall Super Bass, the Charvel's dark aesthetic doesn't translate to its tone, and the combination of ebony 'board, mahogany body and figured walnut top provides a healthy clarity and an even midrange. Despite its name, the Seymour Duncan Full Shred bridge humbucker is a medium-output pickup with a slightly scooped midrange that, when fed through our Tube Screamer-driven Marshall, delivers the consummate 'brown' rock sound.

In contrast, the neck-position SD Alnico II Pro is a more vintage affair, with a snappy twang rather than a saturated or soupy neck humbucker sound, which makes it ideal for blues-rock rhythm and lead playing. The in-between sounds on the five-way switch combine different coils from each pickup, adding further versatility. Position three (the inner coils of each humbucker) delivers an authentic and fun country-rock tone, while positions two (middle pickup plus bridge inner coil) and four (middle pickup plus neck outer coil) provide Strat-like spank for fancy funk workouts.

The MJ DK24 provides something of a paradoxical experience. It's so much fun to play but its superb build quality and high-spec materials and parts are a reminder that it's a serious instrument too – and one that offers the kind of versatility demanded by modern day pros. This is custom-shop quality at an affordable price and a supremely balanced but raucous rock guitar. G

9/10 **Modern rock player or session pro? This is your new go-to guitar**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Ibanez RG5170B-BK Prestige **£1,739**
PRS CE24 **£2,650**
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Jimi Hendrix & Noel Redding
talk strings with Rotosound's
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SETH BACCUS
SHORELINE JM-H90

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Offset-inspired guitars with foil pickups may be the plat du jour, but this UK-made electric offers tones with a difference and superlative build

Guitar makers don't come with much better pedigree than Seth Baccus. The stepson of master acoustic luthier Andy Manson, Seth managed Mansons Guitar Shop in Exeter for eight years, worked with Muse and was even part of the crew for Led Zeppelin's famous reunion show at London's O2 arena in 2007. Building his first guitar in 2004, Seth left Mansons in 2009 to become a full-time luthier. We first encountered his Nautilus Classic model in 2017 and were mightily impressed. But if that was a guitar for those who adore set-necks with curly tops and a mirror sheen, though it shares the same outline as the Nautilus, the Shoreline JM seems destined for a different customer entirely.

As a teenager in the 1990s, Seth fell in love with all things grunge. First envisaged in 2019, the Shoreline JM is a companion model to his more Strat and Tele-influenced Shoreline S and T models and was inspired by the widespread adoption of vintage offsets by guitarists during the grunge era.

"It's become a very versatile base stylistically for a lot of different options," says Seth. "I liked the idea of having those edgy tones and the kind of feel you get with the Jazzmaster-style tremolo and bridge setup but in a regular-sized body shape rather than the larger offset that is traditional. It makes for a comfortable guitar, and a nice balance and weight. And the way the engineering of the parts has improved recently means the vibrato and bridge setups now are much better than they ever were in the past, both tonally and performance-wise. I think the JM combines some of that old-world vibe but with a contemporary quality of performance."

New flame: the roasted maple neck's dramatic figuring is also visible on the headstock

Aged gracefully: the checking and wear is optional but we love it

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,899 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the UK
BUILD One-piece obeche body with Canadian roasted AAAA-grade flame maple bolt-on neck, Indian rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius and dot inlays, 22 Jescar medium-jumbo extra hard frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Mastery bridge and vibrato, Gotoh 510 vintage-style tuners, Anomaly D19 stainless-steel knobs
ELECTRONICS Mojo P-90 (neck) and PAF (bridge) pickups with foil covers, CTS 500k volume and tone controls, Switchcraft three-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.4mm at nut, 51.0mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.4mm at first fret, 23.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.9mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 6.7lb/3.03kg
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
OPTIONS Available otherwise as reviewed with a AAA-grade neck for £2,699. Many other options available – see website
FINISH Ocean Jade Metallic aged nitrocellulose
CONTACT sethbaccus.com

The compact body is one-piece obeche, a lightweight West African wood with a long history in UK guitar-making, having been used by Burns in the 1960s. In keeping with that aforementioned old-world vibe, the body has a beautifully aged Ocean Jade Metallic nitro finish with very natural looking checking and light wear on the forearm contour and bellycut.

The parchment-toned plastics are also tastefully aged, likewise the nickel pickup covers, screws, strap buttons and pickup selector switch. The Mastery Bridge and Vibrato have a brushed finish, as do those very cool knobs from Anomaly Guitar Hardware, which, like all of Seth's guitars, are made in Cornwall. The styling cues all contribute to a classy and considered aesthetic that's a cut above many of the other offset-inspired boutique guitars you'll find on Instagram, and if factory distress doesn't do it for you, fear not – Seth also offers a range of high-gloss and sparkle finish options.

IN USE

We've marvelled at the quality of Seth's neck carves before, and this soft-shouldered and beautifully rounded medium profile is every bit as impressive as the outrageous flame that dances almost holographically across it as your viewing angle changes. The neck's satin finish is flawless, while rolled fingerboard edges, domed fret ends and the carved heel design ensure a smooth ride wherever your fretting hand finds itself.

The combination of lightweight obeche and torrefied maple makes for a lively and rich acoustic response with plentiful resonance and sustain – it just begs for atmospheric shimmers from the immaculately set-up Mastery Vibrato. Plugged in, it quickly becomes apparent that the presence of those foil covers is something of a Trojan horse; with Mojo PAF and P-90 pickups in the bridge and neck positions respectively, there's plenty of muscle under this Shoreline JM's hood.

Obeche's sonic characteristics aren't a million miles away from lightweight

Access all areas: the carved heel offers easy access to the Indian rosewood fretboard's highest peaks

Master plan: the guitar's Mastery hardware offers an upgrade on the performance of vintage offset units

On a roll: handsome Anomaly knobs make executing volume swells a breeze

mahogany and, as a result, the Mojo PAF can cover some of the vintage-rock bite and raunch you'd usually turn to a Gibson for, especially if you're more of a Mike Campbell than a Michael Schenker. The middle setting is at its best in more restrained circumstances, with a beautiful light and phasey tonality that, when awash with hall reverb, reminds us of some of the clean Telecaster tones on Jeff Buckley's *Grace*. Flip to the neck position and the sound predictably fills out somewhat but there's still plenty of clarity. It's actually quite Strat-like, and fans of SRV and Jimi may feel unexpectedly at home here.

If ambience is your thing, you'll find that the Anomaly knobs work especially well for volume swells, with the knurled section sitting perfectly in the crook of the little finger. Meanwhile, if you love the aesthetic here but are looking for an instrument with more of a traditional offset tonality then Jazzmaster-style pickups are available among a plethora of other custom options. There's another offset-inspired Seth Baccus model on the way – a larger bodied design called the Argonaut. Something tells us that's going to be pretty special, too. G

9/10 **Offset stylings meet vintage rock tones in a beautifully made package**

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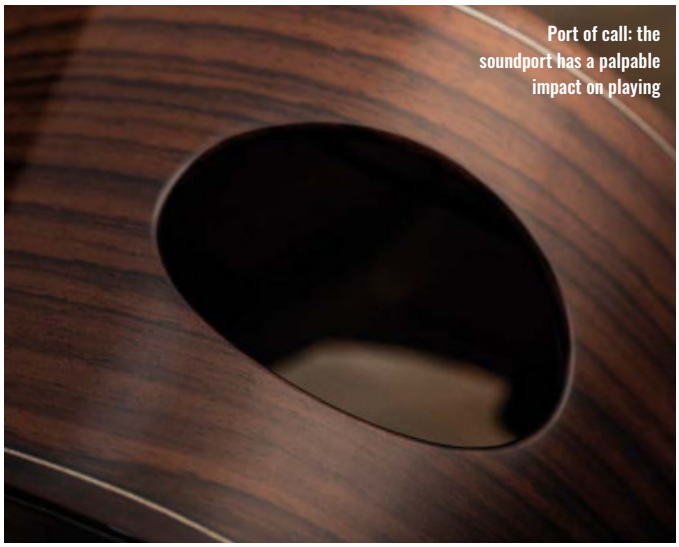
Face forward: the peghead is adorned with tasteful abalone



Port of call: the soundport has a palpable impact on playing

Spruce almighty: The AC722CE's soundboard is European spruce

EASTMAN AC722CE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

With a forearm bevel and elliptical soundport, Eastman's AC722CE offers a twist on the grand auditorium theme

Does the world need another grand auditorium-sized cutaway electro-acoustic? Eastman certainly thinks so. But while its new AC722CE model may look fairly familiar from the nut down, it offers some interesting features that differ from the norm.

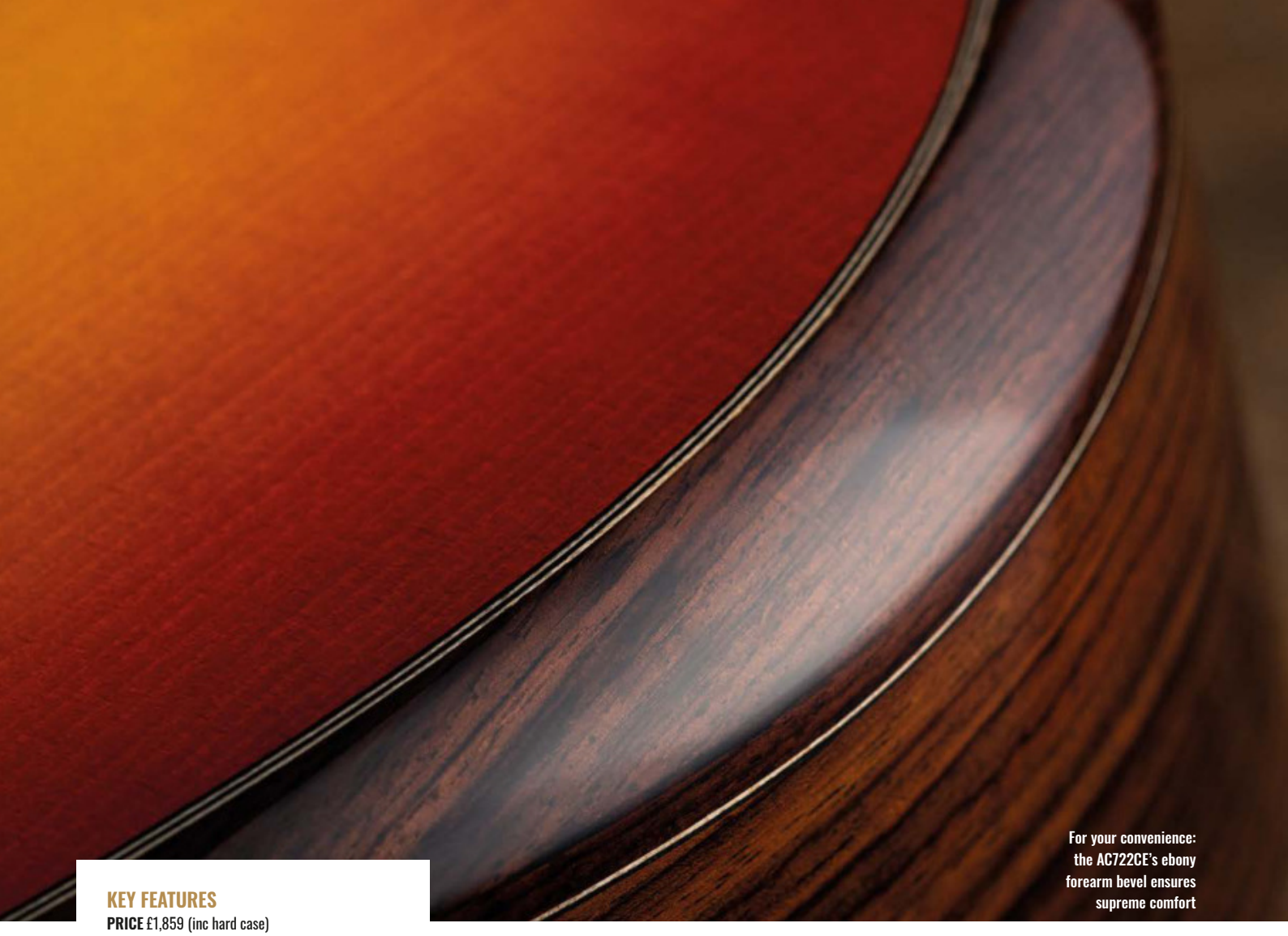
Firstly, we have a European spruce soundboard with hand-carved scalloped X-bracing, which promises an immediate response with a smoother transient than may be expected from Sitka or Adirondack.

The back and sides are rosewood – the genus is not specified but it is a beautiful straight-grained set, presumably Indian, and looks excellent beneath the instrument's gloss finish.

Eastman recently moved away from nitrocellulose to a more environmentally friendly finish that the company is calling Truetone. It features a modified two-part urethane top coat that Eastman says strikes a balance between hardness and flexibility without compromising resonance and tone. If you are in any doubt as to its pedigree, know that it's the same finish you'll find on Bourgeois acoustics.

The soundboard's lustrous Dakota Fade sunburst is very well applied and, although it's a personal preference, it's nice to see a gloss finish on the back of the mahogany neck. This is a fairly substantial neck shape, which Eastman describes as Traditional Even C, and it fills the hand beautifully while feeling fast and engaging from the heel to the volute.

While the neck carve may be traditional, the Kevin Ryan-style ebony arm bevel and elliptical 1.5-inch shoulder soundport most certainly are not. Both combine here to haul this guitar into the 21st century. While arm bevels are becoming increasingly prevalent on guitars of this size and even smaller, the jury is still out when it comes to soundports



For your convenience: the AC722CE's ebony forearm bevel ensures supreme comfort

KEY FEATURES

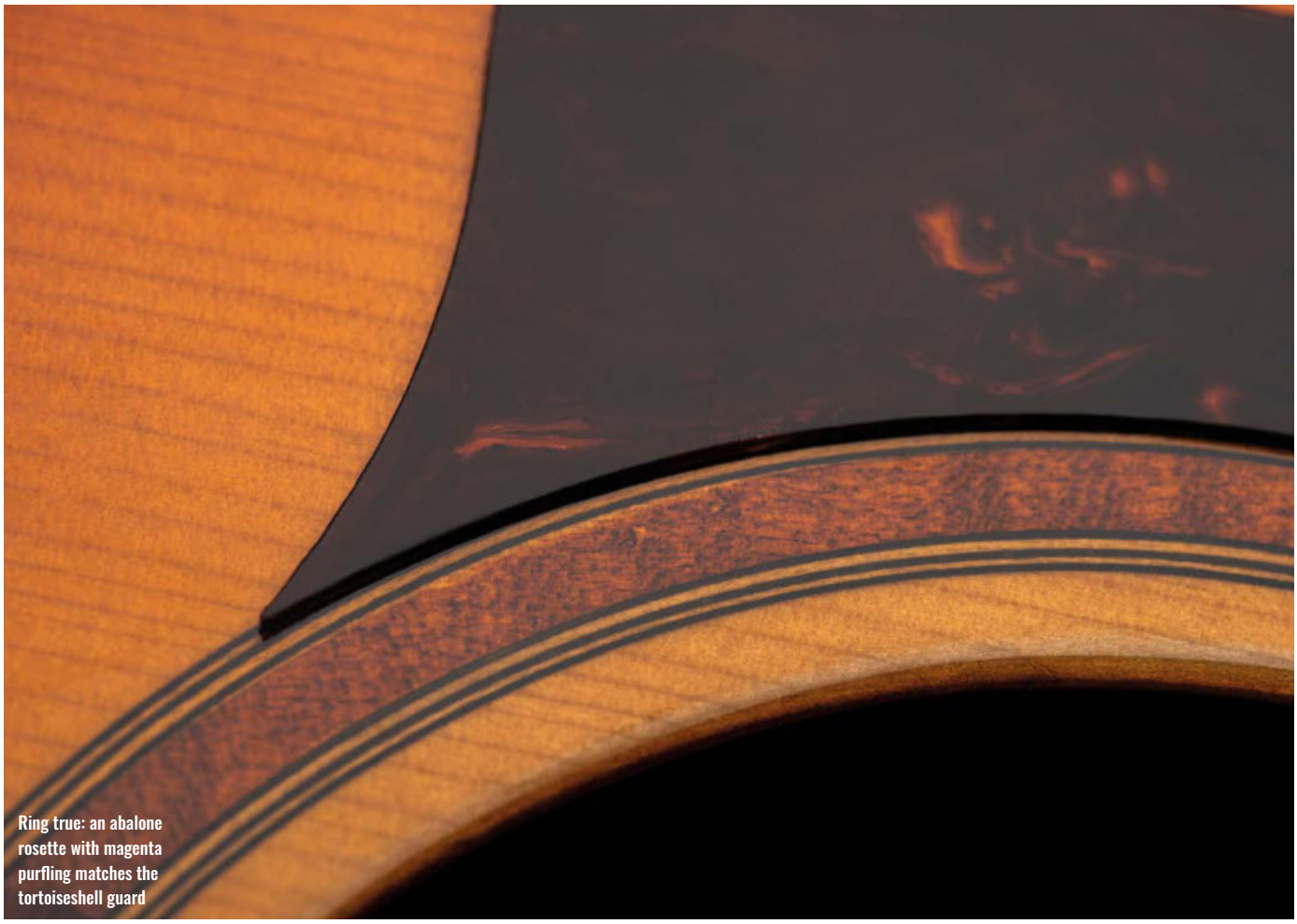
PRICE £1,859 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string grand auditorium electro-acoustic guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid rosewood back and sides, solid European spruce soundboard with hand-carved scalloped X-bracing, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, bridge and bridge pins, bone nut and saddle, Venetian cutaway, ebony forearm bevel, 1.5" soundport, hurricane pearl/abalone inlays, tortoiseshell-style pickguard, dual-action truss rod
HARDWARE Gotoh SG301 machineheads
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs Element EAS-VTC
SCALE LENGTH 25.4"/645.16mm
NECK WIDTH 44.45mm at nut, 53.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.4mm at first fret, 22.6mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.25kg/4.9lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Dakota Fade Truetone gloss
CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

Go-team: the Gotoh tuners make altered tunings a doddle

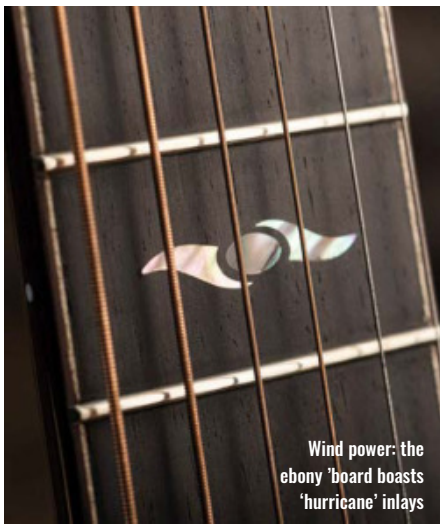
on electro-acoustic models, with some luthiers evidencing a greater susceptibility to feedback at volume when plugged in. There's only one way to find out…

IN USE

Our first explorations of the AC722CE in standard tuning reveal a bright and lively voice with an almost hi-fi quality. There's sustain on tap and the trebles are smooth and nuanced, impressively so, in fact, for a brand-new instrument. The bass response – thanks in no small part to the soundport, which surrounds the player with a haze



Ring true: an abalone rosette with magenta purfling matches the tortoiseshell guard



Wind power: the ebony 'board boasts 'hurricane' inlays

Shell suits you: abalone dots jazz up the ebony bridge pins

of sound – is full and musical, despite the inevitable loss of active soundboard surface area that often comes with the implementation of a forearm-bevel design.

The impact that any soundport has on the playing experience will obviously depend on the proximity of the player's ears to the port itself. When playing seated with a footstool, we find that the results are palpable. However, we suspect that would not be the case when standing but, sadly, without a neck-mounted strap button, we are unable to properly put our theory to the test.

Slipping into DADGAD (a painless process thanks to the well-cut nut and Gotoh SG301 machineheads) shows off tremendous potential for solo fingerstyle playing, with the guitar's crisp immediacy making for an articulate, detailed bass that is matched with liquid, expressive trebles. There's a wide sonic spectrum to explore and the guitar responds musically to changes in right-hand position and attack. When amplified, the LR Baggs pickup system does a great job of translating all this, and you can dial up the volume to small gig levels without taking off in a squall of feedback.

Though there are echoes of Taylor in the Eastman AC722CE's styling, the playing experience and voice are surprisingly different – but still very good indeed. G

9/10 **Impressive sonics and build quality from a guitar that, despite first impressions, has an identity all of its own**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Furch Blue GC CM **£1,050**
Martin SC-13E **£1,599**
Taylor Builder's Edition 324ce **£3,239**

Cort

Head start: The abalone and pearl inlay is subtle but classy

Three's the charm: contours on the forearm, rib and cutaway maximise player comfort

CORT
GOLD EDGE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Premium tonewoods and high-end ergonomics combine on Cort's striking new electro-acoustic. Could it be the new gold standard?

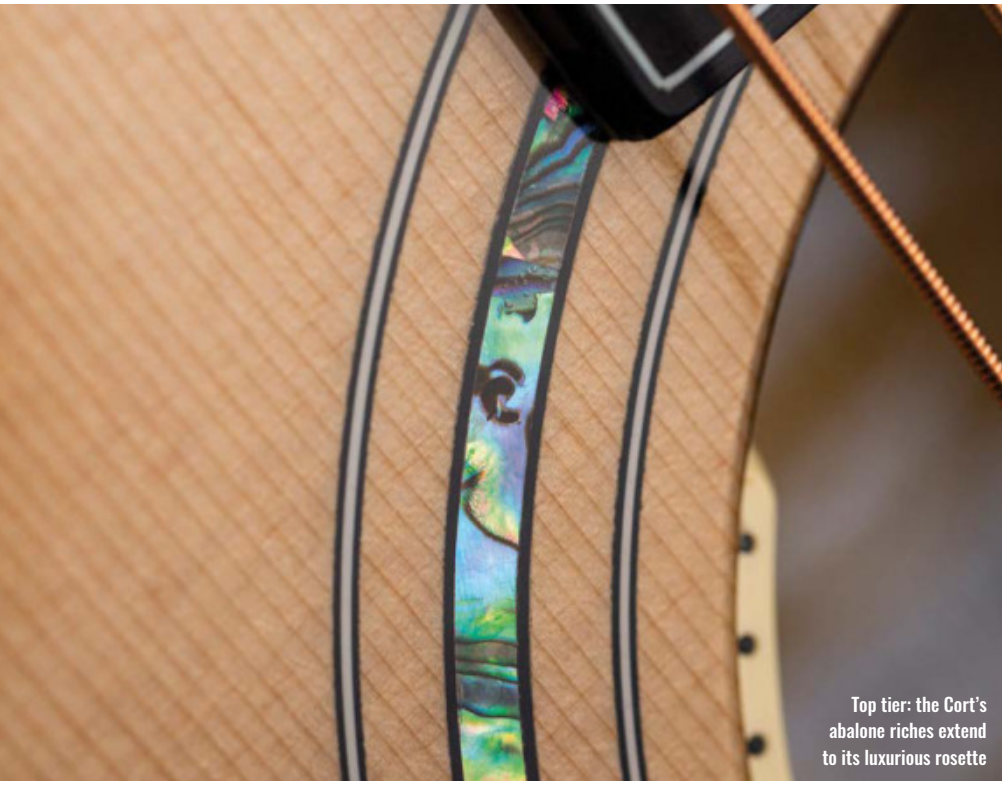
While the company is better known for its value-packed entry-level instruments, every now and then Cort chances its arm at the aspirational end of the acoustic marketplace. The new Gold Edge is a prime example. The guitar absolutely bristles with modern luthier-style flourishes that go some way towards justifying a price-point that might, initially at least, raise a couple of eyebrows.

Though the term that Cort uses to describe this guitar's tonewoods is essentially meaningless, there's no denying that the "Master Grade" flamed-myrtle back and sides of the Gold Edge are eye-catching. The torrefied Sitka spruce top is certainly inviting too, with the honey-toned wood – a dead giveaway that the soundboard has been thermally treated – appearing more like Port Orford cedar at first glance. In short, it's a good-looking guitar.

KEY FEATURES

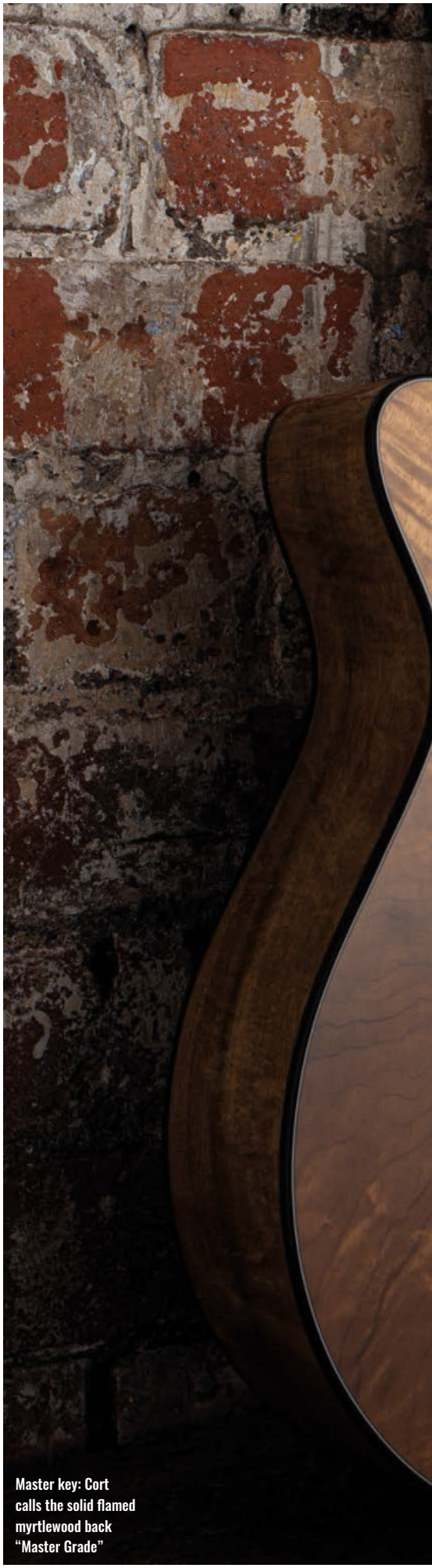
PRICE £1,429 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string grand auditorium acoustic guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid myrtle back and sides, solid torrefied Sitka spruce soundboard, Walnut-reinforced mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, bridge and bridge pins, bone nut and saddle, Venetian cutaway, fore-arm, rib and cutaway bevels
HARDWARE Grover Vintage machineheads
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs Anthem active pickup system
SCALE LENGTH 25.3"/643mm
NECK WIDTH 45mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.5mm at first fret, 23.2mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.5mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.2kg/4.8lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Thin natural gloss UV
CONTACT cortguitars.com

The Gold Edge is built around a 643mm (25.3-inch) scale length and, like other grand auditorium models, fits neatly between the OM and dreadnought styles with its 117mm (4 5/8-inch) body depth and 405mm (16-inch) lower bout. Cort has employed a triple-bevel design with contours for the forearm, rib and cutaway. This sort of thing is more commonly seen on instruments by superstar luthiers such as Michael Greenfield and Casimi Guitars,



Top tier: the Cort's abalone riches extend to its luxurious rosette

Baggs of tone: LR Baggs' Anthem amplifies the Gold Edge's voice



Master key: Cort calls the solid flamed myrtlewood back "Master Grade"

whose work can command prices of as much as 20 times that of this instrument. The Gold Edge's price doesn't seem quite so eyebrow-raising now, does it?

The 14-fret, walnut-reinforced mahogany neck features a double-lock joint and it's a welcome surprise to see well executed rounded fret ends too. It's another feature seldom encountered in production acoustics at this price and which makes for a smooth and comfortable playing experience. Well done for that, Cort!

As befits an instrument that nudges the top of the company's range, the Gold Edge features abalone and pearl inlays on its ebony 'board and bridge. There's an abalone rosette too. The hardware comes courtesy of Grover and includes vintage-style machineheads, while the electronics comprise LR Baggs' dependable Anthem active pickup system.

IN USE

Successful ergonomics in acoustic guitars demand a delicate balance, because the

Shell island: the ebony 'board boasts glistening inlays too

extra kerfing and inner architecture required to support a bevel design can reduce the active surface area of the soundboard. This manifests most often in a lack of bass. But, in this case, the guitar's sound in standard tuning is open and full with a strong fundamental to the note.

Fingerstyle blues and jazz work well and there's plenty of headroom to dig in. The tonal spectrum remains wide with satisfying, musical tones all along the string length. This is possibly a result of the combination of light UV finish, torrefied wood and hand-scalloped X-bracing.

Dropping down into DADGAD reveals a strong sound that excels at big singer-songwriter chord progressions but also packs the sustain necessary for lilting traditional airs, making this a versatile guitar across genres. The LR Baggs Anthem is now an industry standard for plugged-in duties and does a great job of translating the Gold Edge's acoustic textures into an amplified voice that handles dustbowl Americana and oceanic Michael Hedges reverb with aplomb.

While there are some slightly iffy areas in fit and finish, there remains a lot to like about the Cort Gold Edge. It's a crowded market but this guitar is definitely worth your attention. *G*

8/10 **Good looks, versatile tones, top-end details and comfort – all for a relatively affordable price**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Breedlove Pursuit Exotic Concerto **£1,049**
Lakewood M52 **£2,995**
Lowden F-35 Myrtle/Cedar **£4,299**

GAMECHANGER AUDIO
LIGHT PEDAL

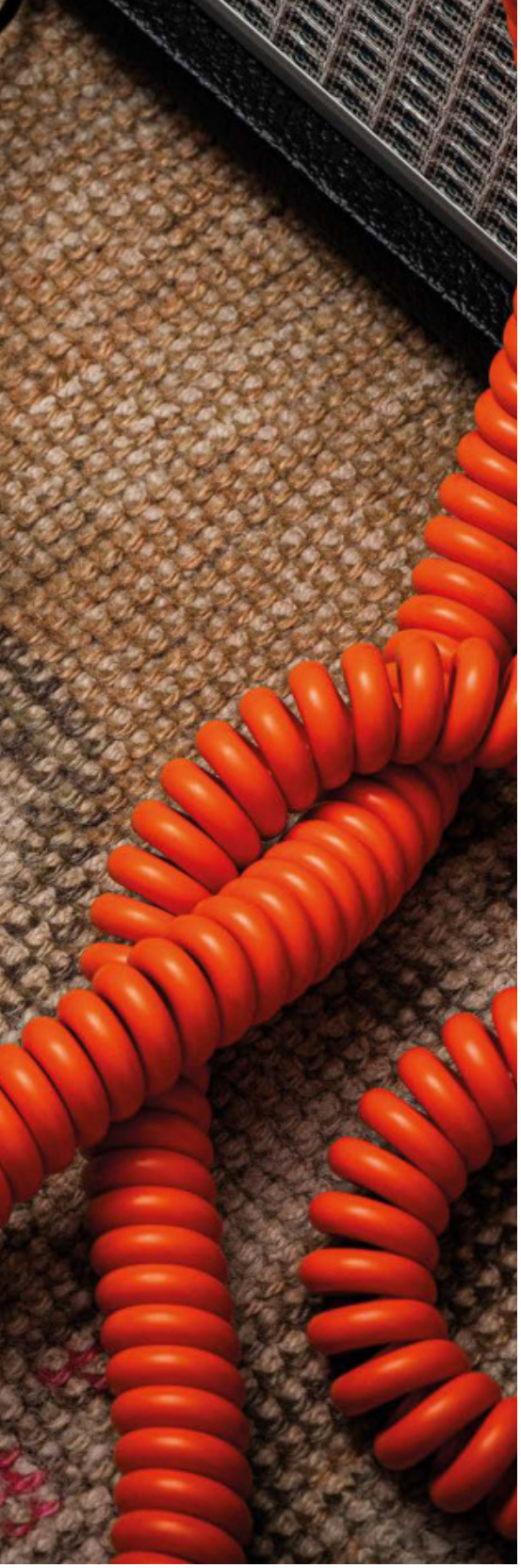
WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

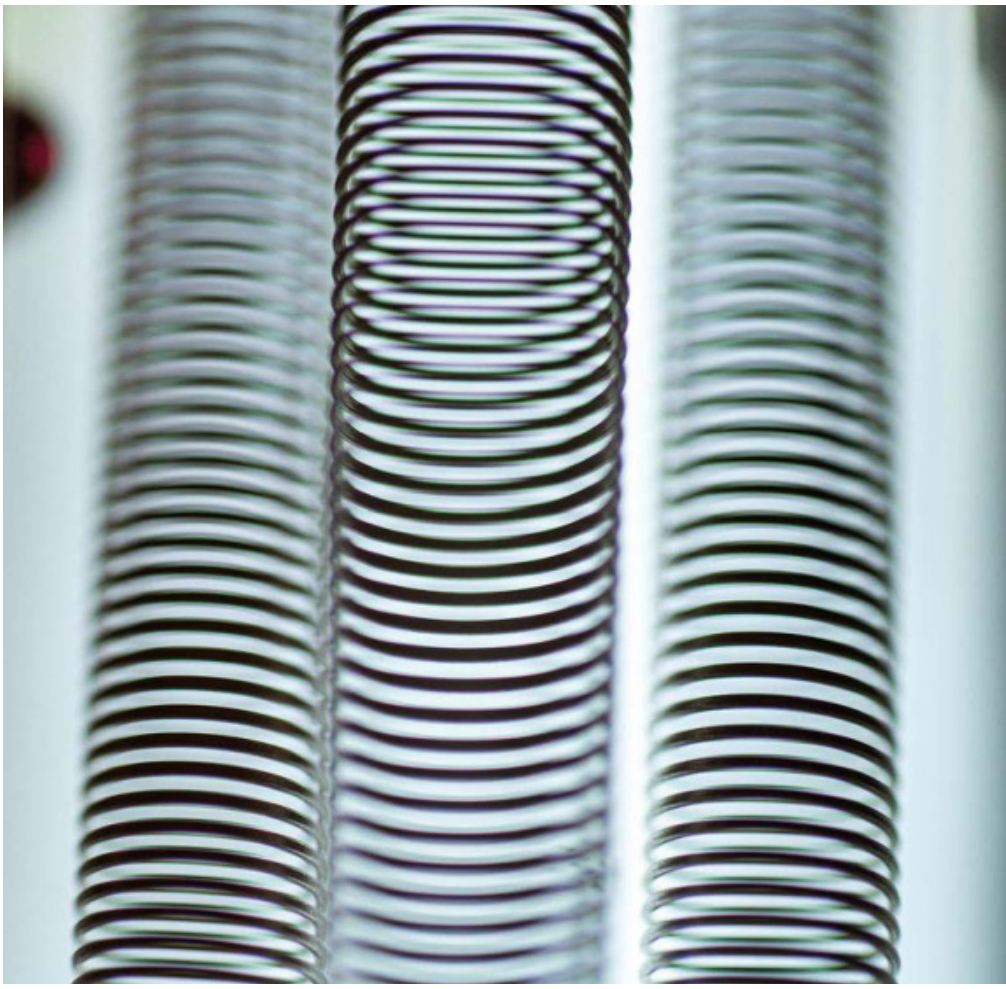
The Latvian mavericks are back with a chunky spring reverb pedal that also offers spacey tremolo and more. Time for some Light entertainment?

The pressure is on for Latvia's Gamechanger Audio to keep living up to its name – how many games are there left to change? – but its latest stompbox, a multi-mode spring reverb that makes use of infrared optical sensors, certainly looks radical enough.

The Light Pedal is actually rather heavy, weighing more than 1kg. At almost 20cm long, it's not about to sneak onto a small corner of anyone's board either. But that's what we've come to expect from the team behind the hefty Plasma and Plus devices, not to mention the forthcoming Bigsby pedal. What we're really interested in here, however, is that big spangly window running up in the middle.

Yes, there are three real springs in here, with transducers at either end, just like a standard amp tank. But those funny little blobs ranged along the sides of the tank? Those are the IR sensors, which pick up the signal along different points of the springs. Why? To detect finer movements and therefore deliver longer decays and a wider frequency response – and, when they're turned on and off in sequence, to open up the possibility of other effects beyond just pure reverb.





See the light: the Light offers more than just standard spring reverb

Tails you win: the Light Pedal lets you switch its reverb trails on and off with ease

Shock absorber: the shock sensor is meant to choke any unfriendly knocked-spring sounds

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €289
DESCRIPTION Multi-mode spring reverb pedal, made in Latvia
CONTROLS Dry, spring and optical reverb levels, reverb tone, six-way mode switch, mode-dependent control, drive, gate; switches for reverb trails on/off and latching on/off
FEATURES Expression pedal input, switchable off/soft/hard shock sensor, buffered bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only (500mA, not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 196 x 121 x 62mm
CONTACT gamechangeraudio.com

That's where the mode switch comes in, promising two flavours of tremolo, plus a sort of lo-fi delay, self-oscillating feedback and even something akin to octave-up shimmer by cranking the harmonics.

IN USE

This is one of those pedals with which we start in sensible mode but don't expect to stay there for long. But, actually, if you are in the market for some spring 'verb simply because your favourite amp doesn't have it, the Light Pedal will do you a solid job… albeit with a little added noise, even while in bypass.

This is real spring reverb alright: loose, clangy and prone to dramatic explosions if accidentally kicked (there is a switchable shock sensor that's supposed to stop this from happening, but it doesn't seem to be working on our review unit). It's not markedly different in tone with the optical sensors, but drier and more fine-grained; you can get nice sounds with both outputs at about noon, especially if you push the drive control to make things super-dense.

But that's enough of the straight stuff. It's in its Sweep and Trem modes that the Light Pedal really opens up its fun-hamper. Never mind the hypnotic way that the lights bounce up and down the tank; the modulation itself, while only applied to the decay and not your dry signal, adds an extra dimension of musical potential. We got a lot of joy from the sweep function set at low-ish speeds, where you can really feel the asymmetrical back-and-forth of the sensors' pulse.

Reflect mode turns the reverb into a kind of delay, though the haziness of the repeats somewhat limits its usefulness, while the last two modes let you go a little mad with drone-like washes. There's some nice ambient weirdness available here – just remember that, as everything this pedal does is based on wobbling springs rather than algorithms, there's a certain uniformity of colour to its effects: that trademark metallic jangle will always be there. **G**

8/10 **A strange and complex machine that pushes the limits of analogue reverb**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Source Audio True Spring Reverb **£219**
Crazy Tube Circuits White Whale **€299**
Anasounds Element + Le Bon **€249**

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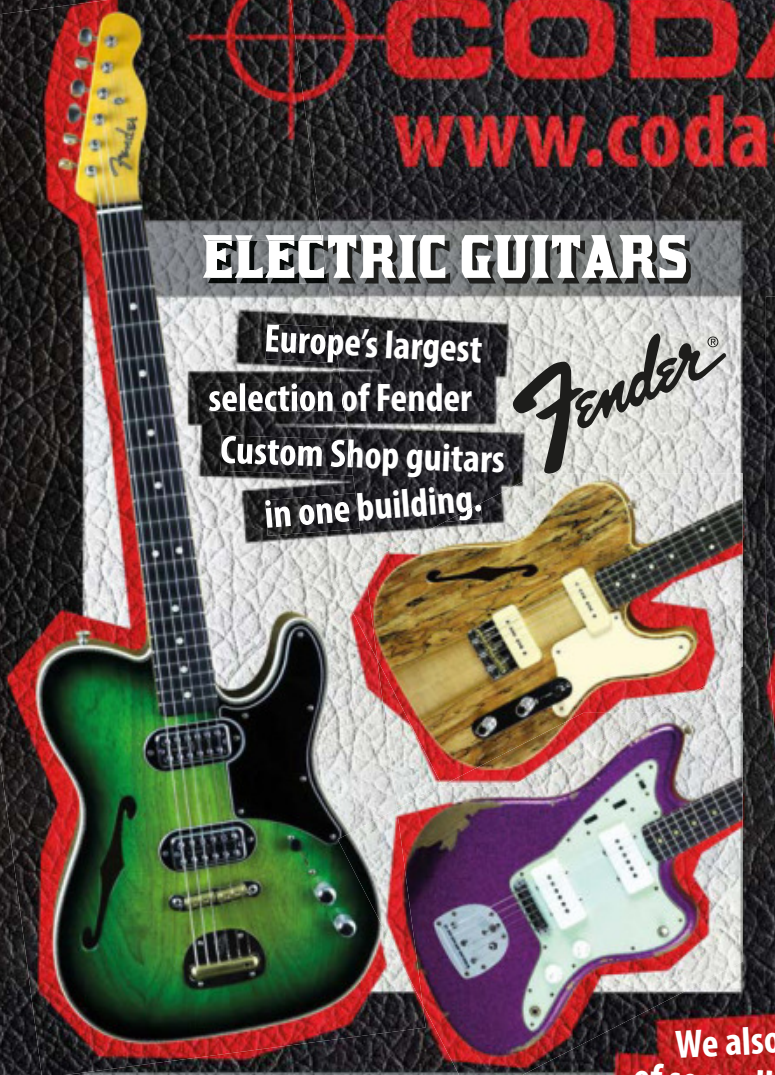

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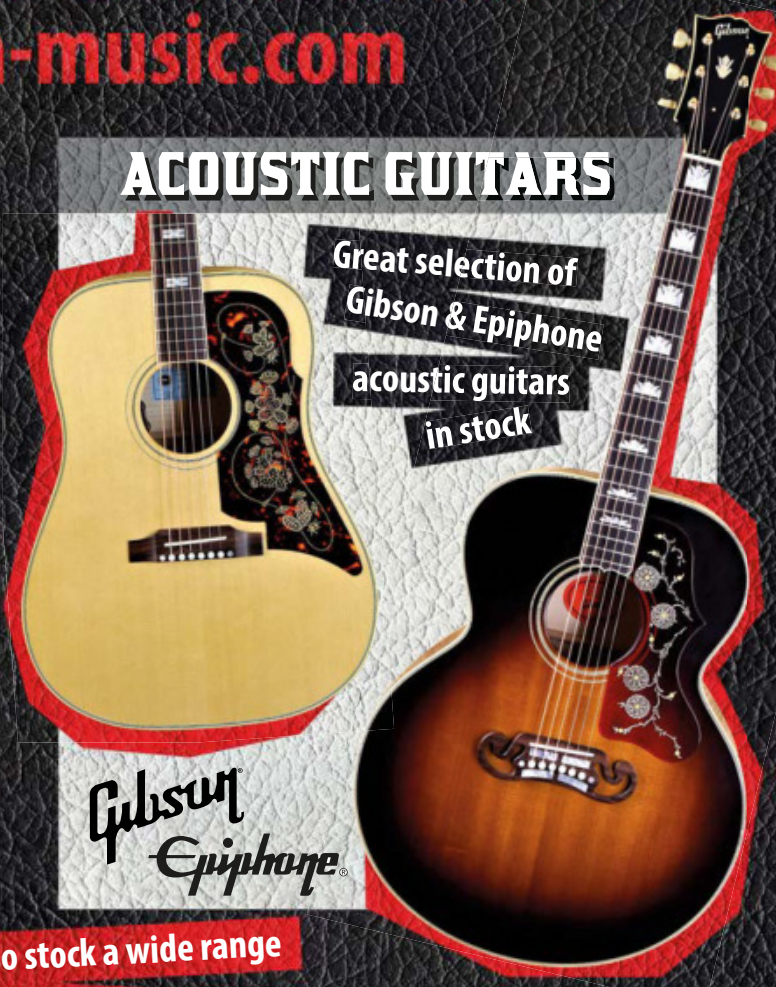

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BECOS

TS8-JZ & COMPIQ MINI ONE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

When it comes to cramming an entire rack unit into a stompbox, few companies are more adept than Becos. Now, the firm is back with a tweakable, portable mini overdrive and its simplest-ever compressor

All Becos pedals share a few key features: they're all black with white lettering, they all squeeze in more controls than might appear physically possible… and they all seem to score 9/10 from us because they're great.

This Romanian maker specialises in compression but has also dabbled in TS-style drive – and that's what's going on with its signature pedal for hard-shredding Ratt guitarist Jordan Ziff. In classic Becos fashion, this is a mini-format stomper but with more controls than the average Boss-sized unit.

Also up for inspection today is the CompIQ Mini One, another tiny pedal but this time distinguished by a lower knob count than most of the company's compressors. Good news, perhaps, for players who want all of the tone and none of the twiddling.

The TS8-JZ looks innocent enough with its standard-issue gain, tone and output level dials. But peer closer and you'll make out four more controls: mini-knobs for wet/dry mix and dry EQ, plus a Timmy-style three-way clipping switch and one marked 'Deep' for negating classic Tube Screamer bass cut.

9-18VDC
CLIP
DEEP
BECOS

One and only: the Becos CompIQ Mini One could become your new go-to compressor

Life's a lot simpler with the Mini One, a VCA compressor. Ratio and gain are the big knobs, with another wet/dry blender and a push-push switch to change the threshold for high-output pickups. The circuit includes a side-chain filter to help avoid bass-driven pumping, as well as auto dynamic timing that changes the attack and release times in response to the shape of the input signal.

Signal boost: the Mini One offers up to 20dB of boost

IN USE

You don't need to have heard of Jordan Ziff to appreciate his signature overdrive: at its heart, it's a straight-down-the-line Screamer, combining sweetly compressed scuzz with that familiar focus on the upper midrange. In terms of sheer tone, there's nothing remarkable going on – it can't quite match our reference Maxon for purity – but the bonus controls elevate this unit into something special.

Flipping the clip switch down to asymmetrical mode, there's less saturation but more clarity and bigness; then in the bottom position we get LED clipping,

Deep thinking: the TS8-JZ's Deep switch allows you to blend it some of your dry signal

Get wet: the wet/dry mix links up well with the overdrive pedal's other settings

Small packages: for such a diminutive pedal, this one packs in a lot of features

which opens things up even further, albeit in a way that's only properly noticeable at higher gain settings.

The Deep switch works just as you'd want it to, while the ability to blend in some dry signal – and to adjust its tonality – adds yet more fine-tuning capability, especially when you're using the TS8-JZ as an 'even-more' box for an already crunchy sound.

There's little to say about the CompIQ Mini One that we haven't already said about Becos's other compressors. It sounds predictably superb: not totally transparent but gently flattering of everything you play through it, softening down harsh transients without dramatically altering your core tone.

There's up to 20dB of boost on offer if you crank the gain and set the ratio low, while the (admittedly fiddly) mix control replicates the effect of a parallel compressor so that you can keep just as much of your untreated signal as you need. For a pedal that's been so ruthlessly stripped of features, there's not a lot we're missing here. More nines it is, then. ***G***

KEY FEATURES

TS8-JZ
PRICE €149
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal, made in Romania
CONTROLS Gain, tone, output level; three-way clipping switch (classic/asymmetrical/LED), Deep switch, dry EQ low/high tilt, wet/dry mix
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-18V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 93 x 47 x 50mm
CONTACT becosfx.com

9/10 **Enhances the classic Tube Screamer formula in ways that are clever as well as useful**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Mooer Green Mile **£60**
Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini **£65**
Nobels ODR-Mini **£69**

KEY FEATURES

COMPIQ MINI ONE
PRICE €139
DESCRIPTION Compressor pedal, made in Romania
CONTROLS Ratio, gain, hi/lo sensitivity switch, wet/dry mix
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-12V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 93 x 47 x 50mm

9/10 **Simplified but as brilliant as ever, this is as good as mini compressor pedals get**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

MXR M291 Dyna Comp Mini **£89**
Xotic Effects SP Compressor **£119**
Wampler Mini Ego Compressor **£139**

Trent's first guitar, the Model 1, is built with sustainability in mind

The Model 1 takes its inspiration from Fender, Novo and Macmull

INDUSTRY INSIDER

TRENT GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Hand-built in Dorset, England, these intriguing offsets feature water-based paints and environmentally friendly components, all at a player-friendly price point. Founder Elliott Trent tells us more

How did you get into guitar?

"Growing up during the early 1990s, guitar was of course a massive part of the culture. With Nirvana and Rage Against The Machine being all around school, it was inevitable that some of us would pick up the guitar."

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"My background is in cabinet-making. For the past decade, I've been running my business, crafting all kinds of fine furniture. It's a trade where you get used to having to focus on the smallest of details – it really is a process of hundreds of little problems that need to be solved. I thrive with that attention to detail, so when a friend asked if I had considered making guitars, it was a no-brainer. Then begun the process of learning all that goes into making an electric guitar. What's great is that many of the steps involved are very familiar coming from a furniture-making background, so I felt very blessed to have a head start. I spent six months or so making neck after neck to hone my skills in what is, realistically, the most important and challenging part of guitar-building. Now, a couple of years down the line, I feel very confident in what I've developed and thankfully the people who play them seem to agree!"

How does your background as a furniture-maker help you as a luthier?

"I'd say making guitars shares a large portion of processes with furniture-making. The time-honed skills in wood preparation, joinery, the precise fitment of parts, fine sanding, and spray finishing all contribute when it comes to making guitars – and of course already owning the majority of the machinery definitely helps! They're both detail-orientated trades, which meant that I was able to focus my time on developing more specific guitar-making skills, given that I didn't have to learn all the basics of woodworking."

Why did you pivot away from furniture-building?

"Having made custom furniture for the past 10 years, it's sent me all over the country and, to be perfectly honest with you, I feel most at home in the workshop. I truly love to spend time at the workbench rather than on the road or at customer's houses. Making heirloom pieces of furniture is always at the forefront of my mind and I feel like

Some poplar Model 1 bodies and their maple necks ready for assembly

Elliott's furniture-making background means he's a stickler for details

this can be even more meaningful when making guitars. The idea that something I can craft for someone will be with them for a lifetime really is the goal for me. Maybe they can pass it on one day!"

When did you realise you had a viable business?
"When I first held the rough-cut body and neck of the Model 1 after several months of drafting, I felt like I was onto something. Once I had gotten the final prototype together and my website got picked up on the fretboard.co.uk forums, it confirmed that I may be able to make this work commercially. The support from the forum has been incredible. I feel very lucky to have found them early on."

Did you have any external investment starting out?
"At this time, I haven't taken any investment or used any grants. But this is mostly because I already own and operate a furniture-making business, which means I have most of the more expensive tooling required to make guitars."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?
"I had a couple of close friends help me with the branding, as it's not exactly my forte. Once I saw what they'd done with the website and the images I'd given them, I knew we had the right tone."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?
"The Model 1 is my debut model. I wanted to take my favourite elements from other guitars and see if I could do something with a few original features. I wanted something that was utilitarian but still great-looking. I look to the classics in Fender and then to the contemporary in Novo and Macmull. What was key to me was to have something that departs from exotic woods and highly figured tops. I wanted to take my experience in spray finishing and apply it to guitars.

The Model 1 comes with P-90s as standard

I use a unique – to the guitar world – and entirely water-based paint system. It's thin like nitro but lacks all the horrible solvents and reactivity that come with it. The overall design of the Model 1 was a collaboration between a dear friend and me. What we've ended up with is a true player's offset. The guitarists who've played it say that it feels reassuringly familiar but has its own voice. Its lightweight due to the material choices, and the neck features carefully rounded fret ends and eased fretboard edges for the best playability possible."

Trent Guitars are built using environmentally friendly materials. Is that a conscious decision? What has the response to that been?
"It certainly is a conscious decision; the concept of sustainability is key for me. Having spent years spraying water-based paint, I'm keenly aware of its benefits over traditional solvent-based paints. The feedback I've had so far has been overwhelmingly positive – people really seem to be onboard with the concept of having something with a little more of the environment in mind. I also have plans for a Model 1 that's made entirely with domestically sourced timber, which is a bit of a break from the norm but certainly possible."

What made you settle on a hardtail bridge with P-90 pickups for the Model 1?
"For the Model 1, the idea was to produce something that was purely utility in nature, with a focus on build quality and playability – a true tool for the professional musician but also accessible for the home gamer. Hardtails are about as simple and solid as it gets. P-90s just fit the vibe of what I wanted to go for with the guitar, all the warmth and those thicker sounds than Strat-style pickups but not as huge as humbuckers. However, I specifically made the body 44mm so that it could accommodate a Stratocaster tremolo if people wanted one installed as a custom order, and I can of course drop in mini-humbuckers or full-size humbuckers with a modified route, again as a custom request."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?
"It has to be the first time the final prototype was plugged into a cranked amp, no question."

What's next for Trent Guitars?
"Now it's all about brand awareness. But I'd be lying if I said I wasn't already thinking about Model 2!" *G*

For more on Trent Guitars, visit trentguitars.com

SHOP TALK

RON WESTWOOD
CUTTHROAT AUDIO

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

It might seem unlikely that a brand could forge a sterling reputation so swiftly on the back of just one under-appreciated classic. But Ron Westwood has a background in the finer points of next-level sound quality and an eye for detail that has helped him hone his craft quickly. These amps truly are a cut above

The reproduction lane of the boutique amp highway followed a mostly chronological path towards the destination we now reside in – which is to say that virtually every desirable design is well covered and they're all available for the right price. While progressing, however, from the Fender-style tweeds that spawned the early boutique-repro boom to the reborn AC30s and AC15s, JTM45s and Plexis, the craze largely leap-frogged Fender's short-lived brown amps of the early 1960s.

Sure, some smaller makers caught up with the omission and some form of brown-panel Deluxe or Princeton was generally out there if you went looking for it. But plenty of players who have experienced Cutthroat Audio's take on the form will tell you that none fully plumbed the potential of the tan-Tolex 6G3 Deluxe until Ron Westwood unveiled his Down Brownie in 2016, which quickly became the transitional 1x12 20-watter to beat.

Coincidentally, elements of Westwood's bio read much like that of a certain Fullerton-born inventor who, after a detour in an entirely different line of work, would go on to found the company whose products Cutthroat's creations are now emulating. Westwood was born and raised in La Mesa, California, a San Diego suburb about 100 miles south of Leo Fender's old stomping grounds. He also trained in accounting at university – taking a four-year degree, rather than Leo's two-year junior-college diploma – before heading off into the business world.

"I got that not because I was interested in accounting," says Westwood, "but I knew I was going to get a business degree and was told, 'if you really don't know what you want to do, get a degree in accounting because that covers all the bases'. I ended up getting into equipment finance and corporate aircraft finance, and ultimately into corporate aircraft sales."

Westwood spent about 25 years flying high in that trade. But throughout it all he remained deeply interested in music, as well as a few other overlapping hobbies. "I was interested in music, played guitar that whole time, always had guitars and amps around," he says. "My other passion is classic cars, so I had phases where I was really into that. I tend to be kind of all-in when I do stuff. Compulsive is probably a better word for it."

THE CABLE GUY

Post-sales career, Ron moved in 2014, back to a house that he and his wife and kids had occasionally called home in the resort town of Coeur d'Alene, nestled between the eponymous lake and the mountains of northern Idaho. At the end of a piece of wire, he soon found an antidote to early retirement and the looming question: what's next?

"We had a house on some acreage and had horses and a workshop," says Westwood, "and our kids were out of the house. Basically it was too much for just my wife and I. We were getting ready for a move and I was packing up my office and music room. I was looking at a patch cable that I'd recently bought on eBay – a Mogami Gold with some Neutrik ends on it – and, like I'm prone to do, I unscrewed it and was looking at it, and I thought, 'This isn't too complicated…'"

Ron had recently become aware of the difference that quality cables can make to a player's tone. "I was still using cables I'd bought in my teens," he says. "And I still have a box of 'em. I was really surprised what a difference a good-quality cable could make. I thought, 'I'm going to start a business making high-end cables!' So, I researched that and came out with a product line and kind of a business plan. Being an avid fly fisherman and living in north Idaho, I came up with Cutthroat Audio because the cutthroat trout is our state fish. I wanted kind of a memorable, edgy name and I didn't want to name it after myself."

Cutthroat's reputation for quality established itself quickly in the US. But once he'd got into making things, Ron found that he wanted to go deeper. As with many a fledgling amp shop, it was his own frustrated tone quest that sent him back to the workbench.

BROWN SOUNDS

"I'd been reading about brown Deluxes on and off over the years, and got back into it," he says. "I was a big ZZ Top fan early on and knew that amp was associated with some of the early albums. I read interviews with Joe Bonamassa calling it a desert-island amp, and probably read some of your stuff along the way, and said, 'You know what? I'm going to find a brown Deluxe!' I discovered in trying to find a real one that not only are they expensive but it's hard to find one that hasn't been messed with."

Long story short, Westwood decided that the best course of action was to build one himself. "I thought, 'The heck with it, I'm just going to build it,'" he says. "I got down to looking at what pile of parts you would need to do one of these, researched that, and built one. I built it stone-stock, for starters, and quickly found that when you're in brown Deluxe territory, when it's really doing its thing, that's seven or eight on the volume and tone controls, and that's loud. It's a 20-watt amp but it sounds great. It sounds awesome."

As plenty of previous guitar-amp recreationists have found, if the original sounds good, thoughtful updates to attune its design to modern demands can often make it even better. But Westwood says he approached the adaptation and modification of the original 6G3 with the physician's Hippocratic Oath: *primum non nocere* – first do no harm. Honouring the glory that is Leo's original creation, Westwood decided that every bonus feature would run parallel to the stock circuit and be removable or bypassable with the flip of a switch or turn of a knob, rather than inflicting permanent alterations on its DNA.

"I thought, 'This thing needs a master volume,'" he says. "So, I researched the various implementations and settled on the one I used. 'Okay, that's great.' But then I started looking at it more and thought, 'Well, that normal channel's not good for much. It's just kind of a dumbed-down version of the other channel.' I got to know of a fellow called Rob Robinette. He has a killer website with amp histories and mods, and I saw his mod in there for doing a lead channel. So, I did that kind of 'Marshall' channel and tweaked it a little bit to make it reflect what my '69 JMP preamp looked like in terms of values. After that it was, 'Well, now we want to jumper those, because that sounds really cool,' so I did the internal jumper mod, and then it was the switchable rectifier and the switchable negative feedback. But I didn't want people to look at this amp and say, 'Oh, that's his take on a '63'. It's basically an accurate representation of the circuit with some useful, practical mods, which are switchable"

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

While Westwood could have kept going with more mods, simplicity and authenticity remained key. "At that point, with that feature-set, I thought, 'That's good!' That's all stuff that I wanted. But I didn't want to make it into a [Mesa/Boogie] Mark V, you know? I wanted to keep it all relatively simple."

"I LOVE LOOKING AT GUT SHOTS OF VINTAGE AMPS! I WANTED IT TO LOOK VINTAGE AND COOL IF AND WHEN ANYBODY DECIDED TO TAKE OUT THE FOUR CHASSIS BOLTS AND SLIDE IT OUT"

Cutthroat's Marshall-inspired Francene; the Champ-based Little Wing; and the Down Brownie, Westwood's adaptation of a 6G3

And with all this going on, Westwood does still keep it simple. In fact, outwardly, the Down Brownie looks a virtually dead-nuts original Fender Deluxe of '61-'63 – until you get a little closer and read some of the additional legends on the front and rear panels, that is. The front includes simply volume and tone controls on the British channel (each with push-pull switching for jump and warm), volume and tone on the normal channel, and speed and intensity for the tremolo. Around the back, there's that master volume control, a three-way negative-feedback switch (with resistor values for the 6G3, 5E3 and JTM45), solid-state/tube rectifier switch, and a three-way output impedance switch.

Given his propensity for the simple ingredients that help to ensure virtuous signal transfer and stellar tone – as in a well-engineered piece of wire connected to a quality jack plug – Westwood certainly identified some essentials to making the Down Brownie the best-sounding recreation of a 58-year-old combo it could be. For all the work inside the chassis, though, one of the greatest variables was found outside it. As many a humble guitar journalist has opined over the years, it's amazing how much the chosen speaker affects the sound of any amplifier.

"It's kind of a dark circuit to begin with," says Westwood, "so if you put a darker speaker in with it, it can get a little muddy. I found that a speaker with a little more cut and which is a late-breaker – since the amp breaks up early on its own – was a good fit. Which is how I zeroed in on the Weber Alnico."

After that, the signal chain kinda works its way backward to identify another of Westwood's essentials: a good – or the right – output transformer, and particularly one with the right iron.

"I really like the Heyboers I'm using now," he says, "with N6 iron. I like the way that breaks up. It has a nice, pleasing distortion to it, to my ear. More dollars isn't necessarily more tone. I started out using Mercury Magnetics iron and I still use a lot of Mercury in other builds, they make a super-high-quality product as well. But I'm now using the Heyboers in the Down Brownies and I've been very pleased with those."

HAND IT OVER

Westwood, like many high-end makers, insists on hand-wiring all of his amplifiers. Rather counter-intuitively, however, for him that propensity arrived first and foremost out of an appreciation for the look of the work.

"I just love looking at gut shots of vintage amps!" he says, enthusiastically. "So, I wanted it to look vintage and cool if and when anybody decided to take out the four chassis bolts and slide out the chassis – either the day they get it or 20 years from now – and go, 'Mmm, not bad!'

"And as you know, the aesthetics are one thing but then you've got lead dress, and there are a couple of things I've found that the 6G3 is very sensitive about as far as lead dress. You have to learn where these wires like to lie. But I'm very visual. For me, on any amp, aesthetics are kind of half the equation. If it doesn't visually look inviting or cool, I'm not likely to walk over and plug it in and turn it on."

"MY THINKING WAS, WHAT IF MARSHALL HAD GOT HOLD OF A BROWN DELUXE AROUND '64 OR SO AND SAID, 'HEY, THIS IS A NICE LITTLE COMBO – LET'S DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT'?"

While Cutthroat Audio has thus far forged its reputation on reworked American-style amplifiers, Westwood has undertaken one transatlantic project that has received a good reception too. The Francene takes its British aesthetics and meaty tone from a 'what if?' concept that presents an alternative route for one of the more beloved student amps of the 60s.

"We've all heard the story about how Marshall took the tweed Bassman circuit and came out with the JTM45," says Westwood, "and the rest is history, as they say. Well, when they did their 18-watt combos after that, they patterned them after, so I've heard, a Watkins Dominator. And those 18-watt amps are great, iconic amps. But my thinking was, what if they had got hold of a brown Deluxe around '64 or so and said, 'Hey, this is a nice little combo – let's do something like that'?

Under the hood, the Francene is clearly a 6G3 circuit. However, that circuit sits on a perforated turret board, uses SoZo mustard caps, and has an expensive Mercury Magnetics Radio Spares 18-watt Marshall output transformer. Westwood elaborates: "It's got two channels, basically a JTM45 and JMP50 preamp," he says. "Then within each channel you can switch in a couple of different coupling caps, and I added a presence control because a lot of Marshalls have one. I also like this combo as a 2x10 with an alnico and a ceramic together."

Otherwise, with three 12AX7s in the preamp stages and two 6V6GTs in the output, the Francene's tube complement is identical to that of the Down Brownie – and yet, as with the tweed-Bassman-to-JTM45 transition, it sounds and feels very different.

"The people who have them love them," says Westwood. "In fact, there are three or four guys who also have Down Brownies and they don't feel that they're mutually exclusive at all. The Francene is definitely very British-sounding and has its own thing going on. The feedback's been real positive."

FRONT AND CENTRE

Having crossed that design off the list, Westwood's quest has taken him back across to the pond to chase a growing obsession with a subset of brown-panel amps that are even rarer and more elusive.

The so-called 'centre-volume' amps emerged at the very dawn of Fender's tan-Tolex era in late 1959 and early 1960, and were made for just a few months before the new line-up settled into its more familiar form. The moniker comes from the fact that the volume control comes after the bass and treble controls on the panel, simply because that's where the potentiometer occurs in the signal flow in the circuits Fender was using in the post-tweed era.

Circuit-wise, the volume potentiometer continued to follow the bass, treble and sometimes middle controls in the brown, black, and silver-panel amps of the next two decades. But maybe too many players were instinctively reaching for the wrong knobs on early iterations, as they were swapped to the more familiar layout partway into 1960. Ron's obsession with this missing-link amp will soon be expressed in a series to include renditions of the 5G12 Concert, 5G7 Bandmaster, and 5G4 Super.

"I've got a 1960 centre-volume Concert," he says, "And that amp uses the same Triad output transformer as on a brown Super. They're cool-looking too, and I've gone so far as to have the pinkish-brown Tolex of the early ones colour-matched in an automotive vinyl die used on seats and car panels, so it's very, very durable. Another thing that struck me on these centre-volumes, in addition to often using tweed-era output transformers and sometimes power transformers, is that the early ones have yellow Astrons [signal capacitors], which are also tweed-era components. When you put all those things together, it's an interesting combination of components, and they have a unique tone. And, of course, those amps have the harmonic tremolo, that phase-shifty-sounding tremolo that's really articulate, and totally different from the bias-vary tremolo on the other browns and tweeds like the Vibrolux. That circuit Leo used is complicated – and he filed for a patent on it. Like, how did he come up with that?" **G**

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DIY WORKSHOP

1965 GIBSON FIREBIRD RESTORATION PART THREE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

It started out as a simple refret and respray but turned into a full restoration. Finally this 1965 Gibson Firebird I is ready to fly again

When restoring vintage guitars, my approach is always to get the finishing as close to factory standard as possible and work then backwards, rather than skimping on the cutting and polishing. Perhaps that explains why I always feel apprehensive about starting the relic'ing process but, once things get underway, it's usually something that I really enjoy. Part of the excitement of it is the unpredictability – it means you can never quite be certain how things will turn out.

I begin this process on the Firebird by refitting the pickguard to protect the body with the bridge still in place. Since the aim is a fairly light level of distress, I use medium-sized bolts rather than a bunch of keys, and I drop them onto the body from about 10cm. I do this all over the body, neck and headstock and, although I do create a few larger chips that expose the mahogany, for the most part I'm left with small dents and chips.

At the end of this process, guitars almost always look worse than they did beforehand. The lacquer-checking, however, with which the aim is to form checking lines around the dents, improves things – it's this that you see on real vintage finishes. Having in the past used inverted air-dusters to induce lacquer checking, as well as indulged in a bit of razor work, here I opt for a deep freeze, a process that I've had recent success with. Overall, I think this is the method that produces the best results – but you need a pretty big and empty freezer to accommodate set-neck guitars, Firebirds in particular.

Having allowed this Firebird's lacquer more than a month to harden, the checking forms quickly. I put it in the freezer for two hours, allow to it thaw and repeat the process twice more. As I'd hoped, the checking lines form around the dents and predominantly run from side to side rather than lengthways, which rarely happens when using the inverted air-duster spray method.

To add some patina, I use water-thin stain. The checking lines are too tight for the stain to wick in but it does a good job of ageing the dents – the checking lines will open up

1 This will be a light ageing job so, in order to dent the finish, I drop medium-sized bolts onto the surface rather than bunches of keys

2 A few larger chunks of lacquer have been chipped off by the bolts but we like seeing the mahogany beneath

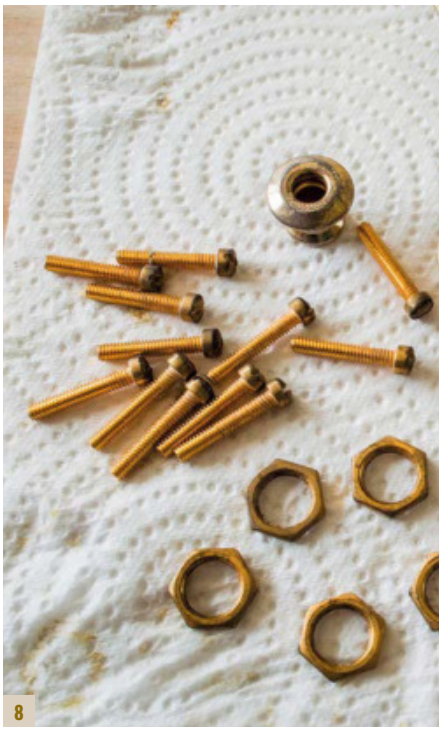
3 You need a sizeable freezer to age set-neck guitars but it's the best way to induce lacquer checking

4 After three freeze-and-thaw cycles, checking lines have formed all over the body

and become more visible over the next few months. With the finish relic'ing complete, the Firebird is ready for reassembly – but not before I've aged the hardware and pickup covers.

GOLD STANDARDS

Most gold-plated hardware has a deep and strong colour when new and the same goes for the parts supplied with this guitar. I age gold hardware in three stages. The first involves putting all the parts into a bag and shaking them up. After that, I use a small piece of Brasso wadding to rub through



5 It's not always easy to get checking on the neck and body but this guitar has cooperated

6 The gold hardware has been rubbed with Brasso in the first stage of the relic'ing process

7 A 9V transformer and a jar of salty water makes fast work of the second stage of the process

8 The gold hardware is now ready to be mounted onto the guitar

the gold, exposing the nickel layer beneath. It's a quick process, but it's vital to be careful not to eliminate the gold completely.

The pickguard screws, tuners, pickup pole screws, washers and nuts all get the Brasso treatment too – and everything looks much more mellow by the end of it. The metal is still too shiny, so I use a 9V transformer and a jar of salted water to take care of that.

In order to do this, the positive side is connected to a large wood screw suspended in the water, with the negative wire wrapped around the part being relic'd, which I dip into the water – close to but not touching the wood screw. Within seconds the area that's been in the water turns a murky grey and looks decades older. All the parts are done within minutes.

The tuners require a different approach because I don't want to immerse them in water. I pour a small amount of 37 per cent hydrochloric acid into a plastic container with a platform for the tuners. The tuners are placed on top and I replace the lid. The acid fumes dull the tuners in a natural way. I remove them and wipe them down after a few minutes. If you attempt this, wear gloves and goggles, and work outside.

PICKUP PREPARATION

The guitar's original control knobs look fantastic and the pickguard is clearly old, though I'm uncertain as to whether it's original. In contrast, the brand-new P-90 covers look too clean and shiny, so they need to be aged to get them looking right on this guitar. I start by using a countersink drill bit to deepen the fixing-hole screws. The bit is quite sharp, so I'm able to do it by hand. To dull the surface, I rub the covers down with a 3,200-grit foam pad and then drop bunches of keys onto the covers to create random dents and scratches.

9 After bathing them in hydrochloric acid fumes for a few minutes, the tuners are fitted onto the headstock

10 Most of the controls and wiring have survived over the years but some tidying and cleaning doesn't go amiss

11 With the Monty's P-90s reinstalled with relic'd covers, the wiring is complete and the guitar is strung up

12 The semi-circular cut-out in the truss-rod cover has been plugged but I leave the snapped tip because it's part of this guitar's history

With the relic'd gold pole screws now installed, the Monty's P-90s are a lot more in keeping with this Firebird's new aesthetic.

COME TOGETHER

Besides tidying up the control wiring and installing a pair of ceramic disk tone capacitors, reassembly is straightforward. Having tested the bridge and the new frets before spraying the guitar, I knew it would play and intonate nicely. The owner and I are still deciding whether to replace the original nut but I'm able to glue a repair patch into the truss-rod cover where it was cut out for three-per-side tuners. I leave the broken area at the tip because it's part of the guitar's history.

Some will feel that the guitar should've been fitted with period-correct chrome hardware, and the finish would certainly look more vintage if it were a bit greener. Ultimately though, it's a personal choice, and one of the advantages of having a vintage guitar restored is that you can make it exactly as you want it.

Had the owner asked me to fit three monsterbuckers and a Floyd Rose, I'd have turned the job down. But as things stand, the gold-plated hardware can be swapped out and a few hours in bright sunlight would kick off the greening process.

I understand the thinking behind these specs and, with all the original gold knobs in situ, I like the way it's turned out. This Firebird has ample sustain, a balanced tone, is almost effortless to play, and the Monty's pickups do it justice. It's been a challenging project but the guitar is well worth it. I hope it will now be good for another 50 years. **G**

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AMPLIFIER FAQ: SERVICING BERNIE MARSDEN'S VINTAGE GIBSON AMPS PART 1

In the first of a two-part special, our resident amp tech Chris Fantana has a pair of vintage amps belonging to ex-Whitesnake guitarist Bernie Marsden in the shop – and both are in urgent need of some TLC

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

1

2

1 The Gibson Lancer and Ranger amplifiers, both of which are in desperate need of service

2 This Lancer is a very early model, dating to 1959

3 The Jensen P12R speaker is fitted to both amplifiers

3

I recently received a phone call from Bernie Marsden, who wants to use his two vintage Gibson amplifiers in an upcoming studio session. Neither was performing as it should, so it's time for us to get the soldering iron out and get them ready for recording.

First on the bench is a Gibson Lancer amplifier, model GA-6. This model first appeared in the 1960 Gibson catalogue with a list price of $135 ($1,340 adjusted for inflation). The older design, without the Lancer moniker, is still shown in the 1959 edition of the catalogue. Shipping ledgers show us that 1,031 units were dispatched in 1959 and just 518 in 1960. There's no data for the split between the old and new models in 1959. This particular amplifier, serial #28464 dates to late 1959 and is unusual in that, unlike the 1960 and 1961 models, it features a tag-board construction rather than the later eyelet-board circuits. Quite a rare one, then, as I cannot find a photo of another like this online.

TWEED TONES

To the untrained eye, the schematic for this amp looks to bear a remarkable resemblance to Fender's late 5C3/early 5D3 Deluxe amplifiers, complete with paraphrase phase inverter and grid-leak bias input stages. Take a closer look, however, and it soon becomes clear that the engineers at Gibson really did know how to design a circuit: the component values chosen at critical locations are well thought out, with the focus on power and clarity for both guitar and microphone.

The cabinet is covered in tweed – or twill-vinyl – and is adorned with what's probably the best-looking handle I've ever seen. The baffle is slanted backwards to help project the sound and the cabinet is made sturdily from finger-jointed pine.

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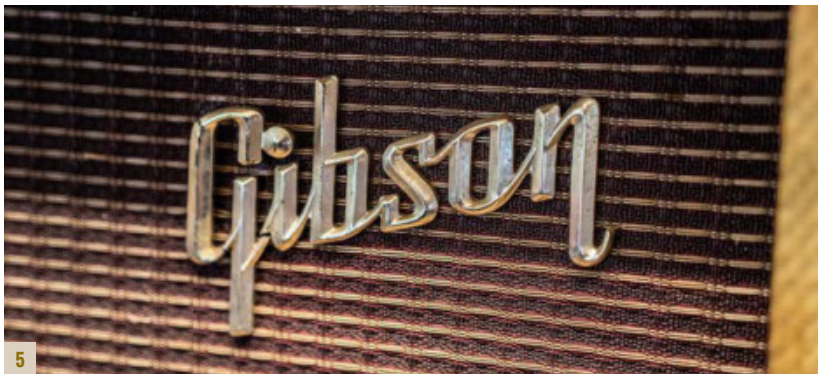

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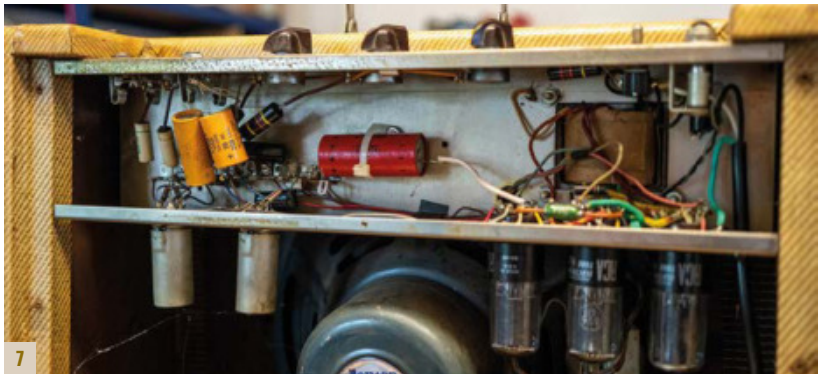
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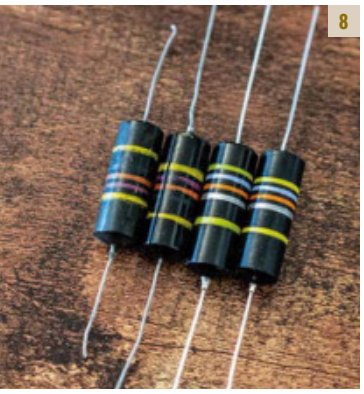
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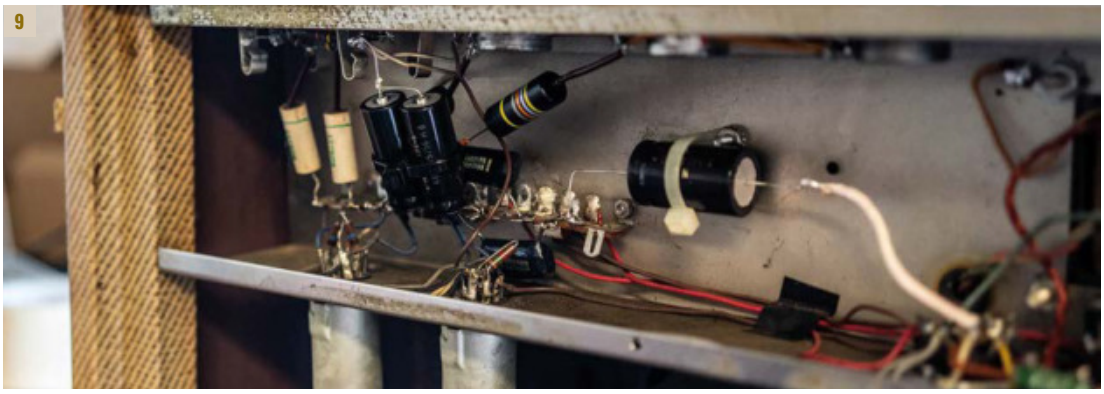
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I know that this amplifier has been played recently, so after a quick visual inspection, I'm happy to power it up and give it a play test. As always, a soft-start using a current-limiting device is always recommended to ensure that nothing goes awry. The amp comes to life quite quickly and we're immediately presented with a mid-level hum that's quite intrusive and indicative of old, leaky filter capacitors. We've talked previously about the importance of a cap job – and this amp is way overdue that service.

Despite having many guitars within arm's reach, we find that a looper pedal is an excellent tool for the workbench as it allows the use of both hands for testing and repair while the looper provides a consistent reference sound. We're very fortunate to have had Peter Honore record a number of single-track loops for our Boss RC-3 Loop Station pedal, which is regularly used for this purpose. By proxy, Pete plays nearly every Rift amplifier that comes off the bench – and every repair too! With our looper connected to the guitar input, turning up the volume and tone controls reveals a glorious, rich tone. What a sound! This circuit, coupled to the vintage Jensen P12R alnico speaker is a fantastic match that far exceeds my expectations.

Unfortunately, all three of the controls are scratchy, with loud pops and rustles coming from the speaker whenever they're turned. Your first port of call might be to clean the potentiometers but this is something else. If the scratchiness is inconsistent each time the control is turned, then it's probably dirty. If, however, it produces the same noise each time, it's likely that DC voltage is making its way onto the pot's wiper. A voltmeter check confirms this: we find near 10v on the controls – any more than 0.1v is unacceptable. The cause will be the preceding coupling capacitors.

A visual inspection shows that one of the 47nF bumblebee capacitors has split open, a common sight in TV/radio repair but less so in guitar amps. Thankfully, direct replacements are available from Jupiter and will allow an almost invisible repair.

After the bumblebees are replaced and the filter cap job completed, another test reveals nothing more of concern. Everything is working as intended. Output was rated at 14 watts and we measure exactly that on the bench. After a final service, we get this one back to Bernie. Come back next month to find out what happened with his other Gibson amp, the Ranger. G

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4 This handle is something to behold

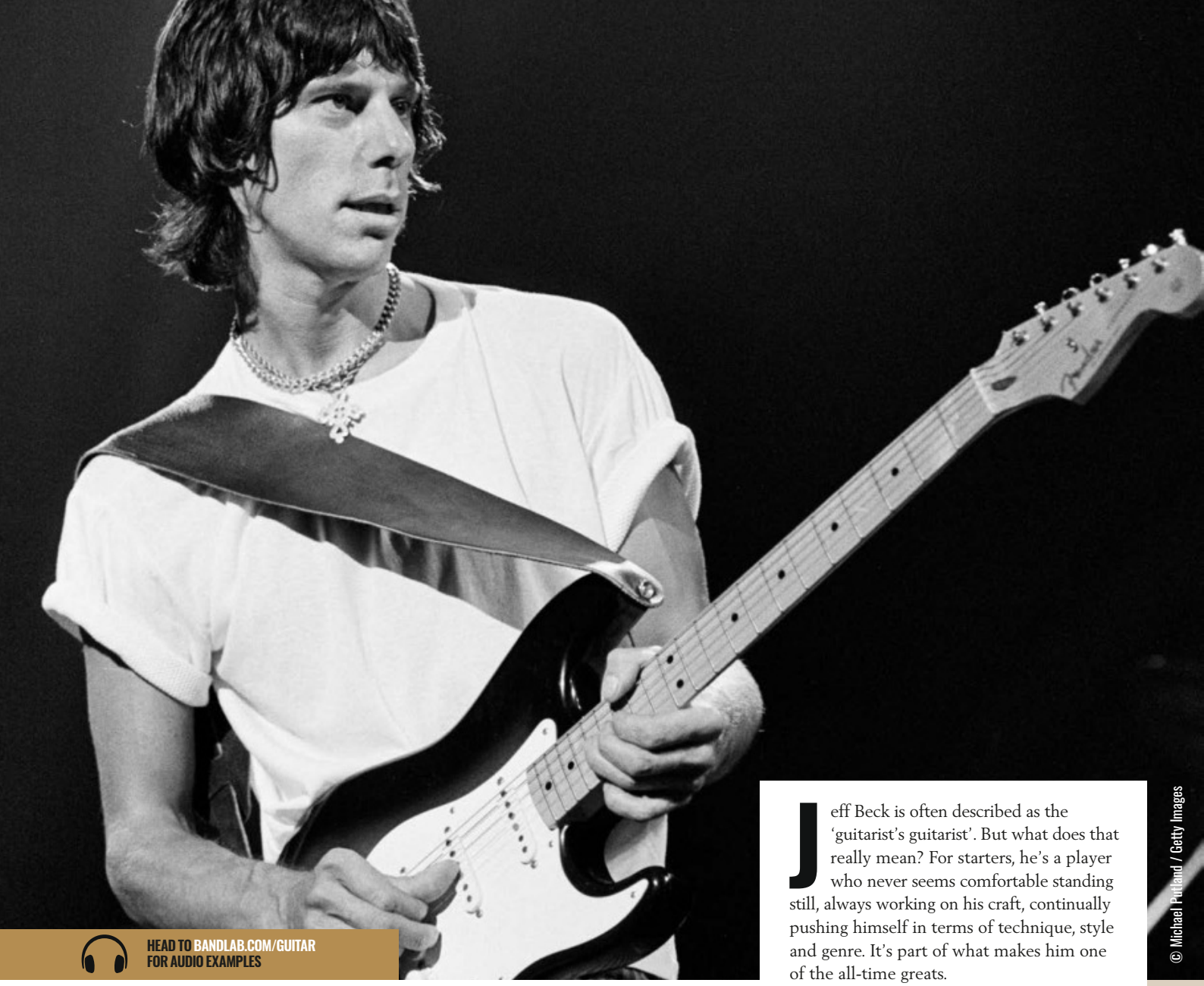
5 No questions about who made these

6 Two channels, each with two inputs, one for guitar and the other for microphones

7 Inside the Lancer's sparse chassis

8 The two faulty capacitors (left) and their modern replacements (right)

9 The work is completed and this Lancer is ready for action



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FIVE MINUTES TO...

JEFF BECK

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

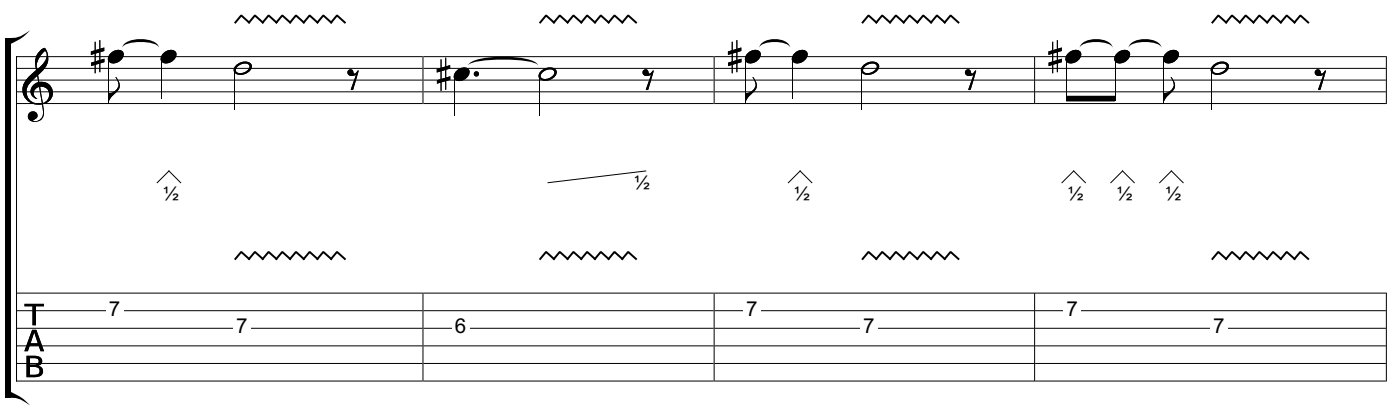
The legendary guitarist has spent 50 years pushing his creative boundaries, so the rest of us have a lot of catching up to do. But working on these key aspects of his guitar style is a good start

Jeff Beck is often described as the 'guitarist's guitarist'. But what does that really mean? For starters, he's a player who never seems comfortable standing still, always working on his craft, continually pushing himself in terms of technique, style and genre. It's part of what makes him one of the all-time greats.

Yet, despite his many reinventions, there are aspects of Beck's playing that have remained constant throughout his long and varied career: his fingerstyle is expressive, his picking style is aggressive, and he loves a vibrato-bar scoop, pulling it up to target notes. Ready? Then grab your floating-trem Strat as we leap into some of Jeff's techniques. All the licks in this lesson are in the key of D major.

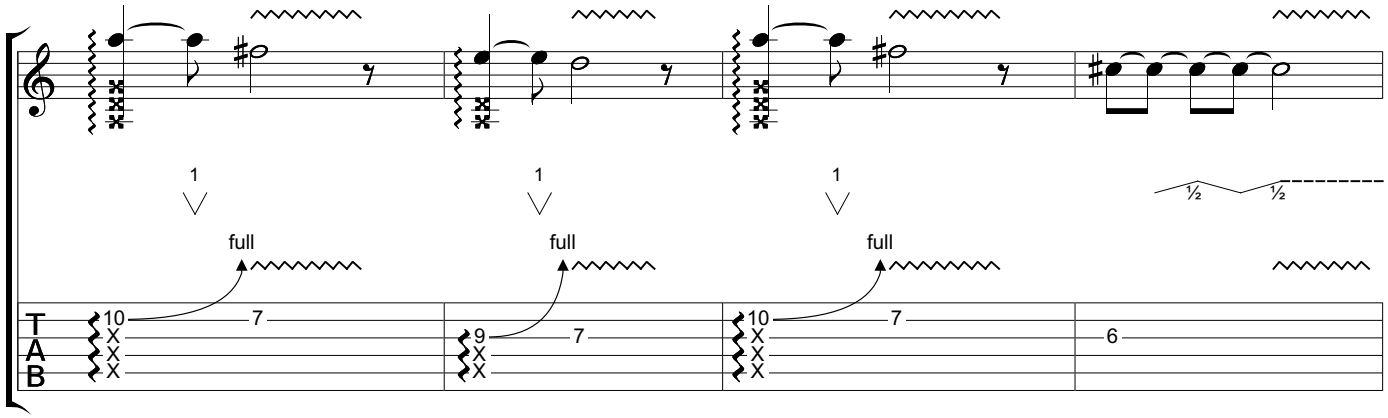
TREMOLO BAR NOTE TARGETING

Don't let the lack of notes in this lick fool you – there's some tricky technique here. It's all about using your guitar's vibrato arm to raise the pitch of the notes to target others. This is what gives Beck's playing its slide-like quality.



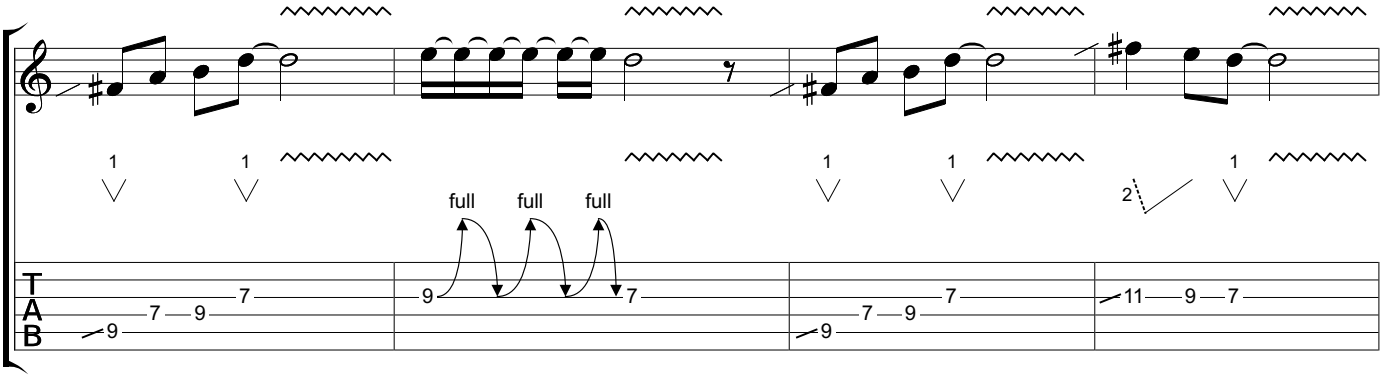
BAR FLUTTERS

This is fairly simple to play without the vibrato action and the rake into the string bend is standard stuff. However, when you're holding that bend, hit the vibrato arm to apply a fluttering to the note.

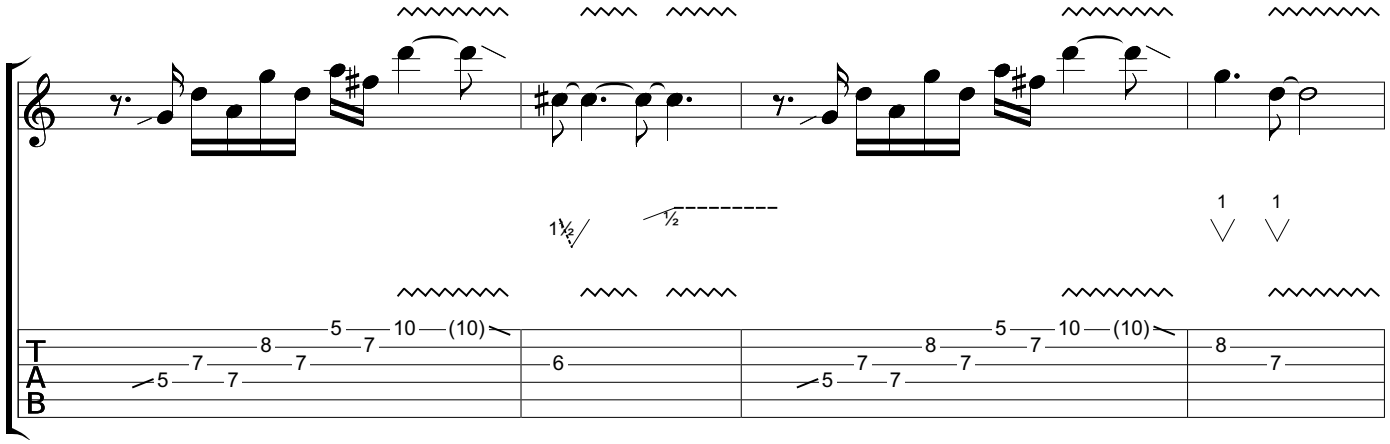


VIBRATO BAR DIPS AND SCOOPS

Featured heavily in the Jeff Beck guitar playbook is his use of vibrato scoops and dips ahead of his notes. This lick makes use of such scoops and dips to give the notes an interesting texture and feel. In your playing, try to vary the amount you scoop the bar in order to increase or decrease the intensity of the effect.



OUTLINING CHORDS WITH NOTES

Beck often uses the chords that sit under a song and plays targeted notes or runs to suit that chord progression. The progression beneath this lick uses a pattern that contains Dsus4, A, E and G chords. The first bar plays through a series of twin note pairs that outline this chord, ending on the high D note. The second bar has a C♯ note, which is in the A chord, and uses the vibrato arm to pitch it up to a D note from the D chord that follows. The final bar uses G and D notes to outline the chords at this part of the track too.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

CHORD CLINIC

D MAJOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

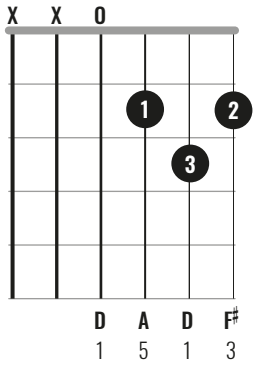
Get to grips with some arresting shapes and inviting variations on the D major chord

D major is one of the easier open-string chords, the close spacing of the notes making it fall under the fingers relatively comfortably. It's a popular key for songwriters, as chords IV and V are G and A major, and chord II is E minor, meaning most of the common chords in the key are available as open-string chords.

As a relatively high-voiced four-note chord, D major sounds chimey rather than weighty. However, as you'll see, this can be altered by using drop D tuning. The chord can also be re-fingered so that finger one is available for bass notes and slash chords, as well as, possibly, hammer-ons and pull-offs on the lower strings.

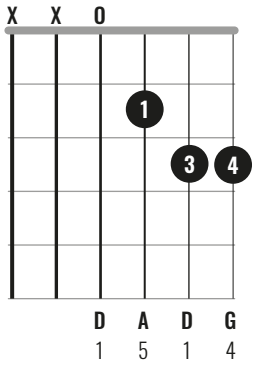
The notes of D major are D, F♯ and A, the root, major third and perfect fifth, steps one, three and five of a D major scale. With the bright-sounding major third as the highest note, there's plenty of potential here for variations using suspended chords, sixths, and sevenths. Enjoy playing around and experimenting with these examples.

D



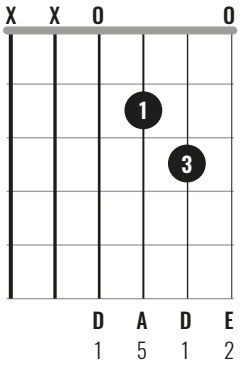
Those with large fingers can struggle to hold the D on the B string without muting the G and high E. Allowing the hand to rotate outwards a little so that fingers one and two line up with the frets can help. If possible, pop your thumb up over the edge of the neck to mute the low E; chords sound best with the root note in the bass and, while you might get away with the open A, the E definitely doesn't fit.

Dsus4



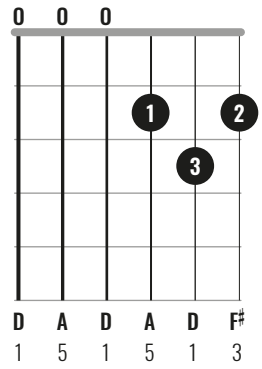
There are two kinds of suspended chord, sus4 and sus2. To make a sus4, you put the fourth in the chord instead of the third. In this case, that means playing the note G instead of F♯. Suspended chords seem to want more than anything to go back to the original major, so place your pinky on and off as you strum. Sus chords sound good in D because of the third's exposed position at the top of the chord.

Dsus2



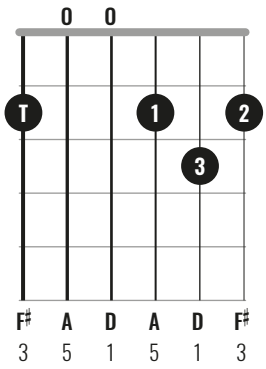
Here we have the other suspended chord, the sus2, which also sounds great when played alternately with the major chord. You can also have fun mixing both of these sus chords with the D major chord. You'll be in good company too, as the catalogue of artists that have used these sounds ranges from Led Zeppelin to Bryan Adams and from the Cure to KT Tunstall.

D (DROP D TUNING)



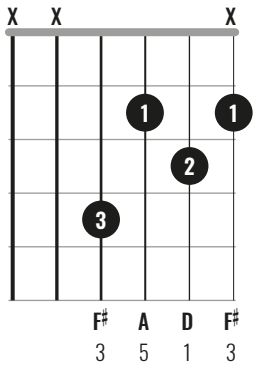
Our favourite method of putting a guitar in drop D is to play the E sixth and D fourth strings at the same time, and then drop the sixth string until they sound an octave apart. Depending on your guitar, it should take about half a turn of the tuner. The result is a resonant D chord and an interesting reconfiguring.

D/F♯



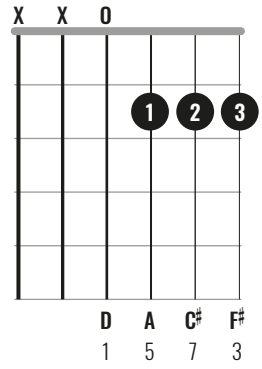
Back in standard tuning, some of the guitar's unused low notes are crying out to be added to our basic D major shape. Here, we've allowed the thumb to come over the edge of the neck to hold down a low F♯. If that's tricky for you, re-finger the chord using all four fingers.

D/F♯



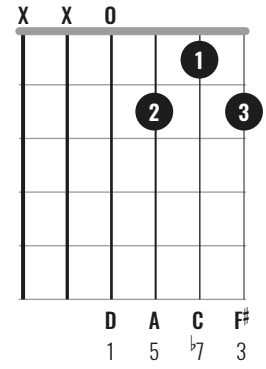
Here, we've shifted the F♯ bass note up an octave to the D string. With adjustments to the fingering, you could also play D/E using the second fret on the D string. The open A also provides interesting bass notes; the second and third fret notes B and C are good choices when descending from D to A.

Dmaj7



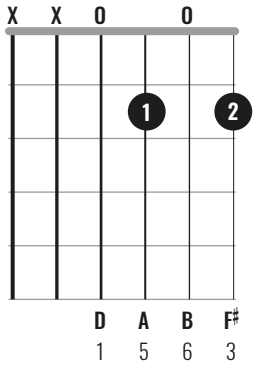
Taking the D note on the B string down one fret brings C♯ into the chord. This is the major seventh, making a D major seventh chord. This chord could well be played with just one finger in a half-barre across the top three strings. Major sevenths sound dreamy and especially good leading onto D7 and D6.

D7



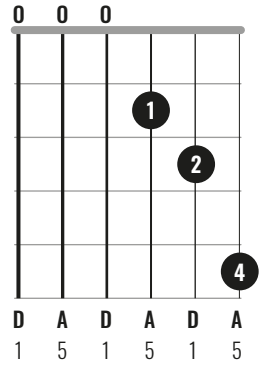
When you add the minor seventh, C, to a D major chord, you get D7. This chord wants to progress to G, the tonic chord of which this is the dominant. Music shouldn't always do what we expect, however, so try playing D, Dmaj7, D7 and then G minor. Or E minor. Or maybe B major. Experimentation is key.

D6



The major sixth adds an interesting colour to major chords but the D6 can be hard to fret, as the fretted notes can get in the way of the open strings. Try using fingers two and three instead of the more obvious one and two. This chord sounds good in a sequence involving D and Dmaj7.

D5 (DROP D TUNING)



D5 is a chord made up entirely of the notes D and A, the root and fifth. You could think of it as a D major chord with no major third. For this shape, we've returned to drop D tuning, and it's a massive sound that's impressive on acoustic and electric but even more so on a 12-string. Remember: sus chords, sixths and sevenths will all work equally well when you're in drop D tuning.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of The Ultimate Guitar Course (Race Point 2014), the Electric Guitar Handbook (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

JORDAN MAILATA

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The starting left tackle for the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles tells us how his Acoustasonic Strat helps him unwind, why everyone should listen to the other Eagles, and how he'd really like a spiky acoustic…

The moment it all started...

"It all started when I was watching my old man play guitar at family BBQs and birthday parties."

I couldn't live without my...

"I can't live without an acoustic guitar. Everywhere I have lived in my life, I've had one in the house. It's a small part of my life that gives me space and time to relax and have fun. Recently, I've been loving my Fender Acoustasonic Strat."

The one that got away...

"Oh man, I can't remember the brand but, back home in Australia, I used to own a 12-string guitar that I received as a gift from my grade six teacher, Mr Bedford, and my old man sold it. I've never seen that guitar since."

My signature model...

"I've always liked the look of the Jackson Pro Series Signature Dave Davidson Warrior WR7, so probably something that's spiky-looking and has more of an acoustic sound… if that's possible!"

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"*Tennessee Whiskey*, but Chris Stapleton's version."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Play with all your heart. My old man said that to me all the time."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"I remember performing in front of my high school and, as the song progressed, I could hear the guitar detune itself. I just remember thinking, 'This can't be happening after all the sound checks we did before it – @!#$ me!'"

My guilty pleasure...

"Oh, it's definitely just listening to the same song on repeat for months. I'm talking about as soon as I can I put music on – at home, the locker room, in the car. I have no shame."

I'm in the band...

"Bon Jovi, hands down!"

I wish I was there...

"I know I just said Bon Jovi but one gig I'd have loved to have been at is definitely The Eagles' live acoustic *Hell Freezes Over* show in 1994. *Hotel California* was crazy. If you haven't heard it, I suggest you check it out!"

The first thing on my rider...

"Boxes of Essentia Water. Essentia Water, please sponsor me [laughs]!"

If I could just play one thing...

"I would love to learn how to play the blues or jazz fingerpicking style." *G*

Follow Jordan on Instagram/Twitter @jordanmailata

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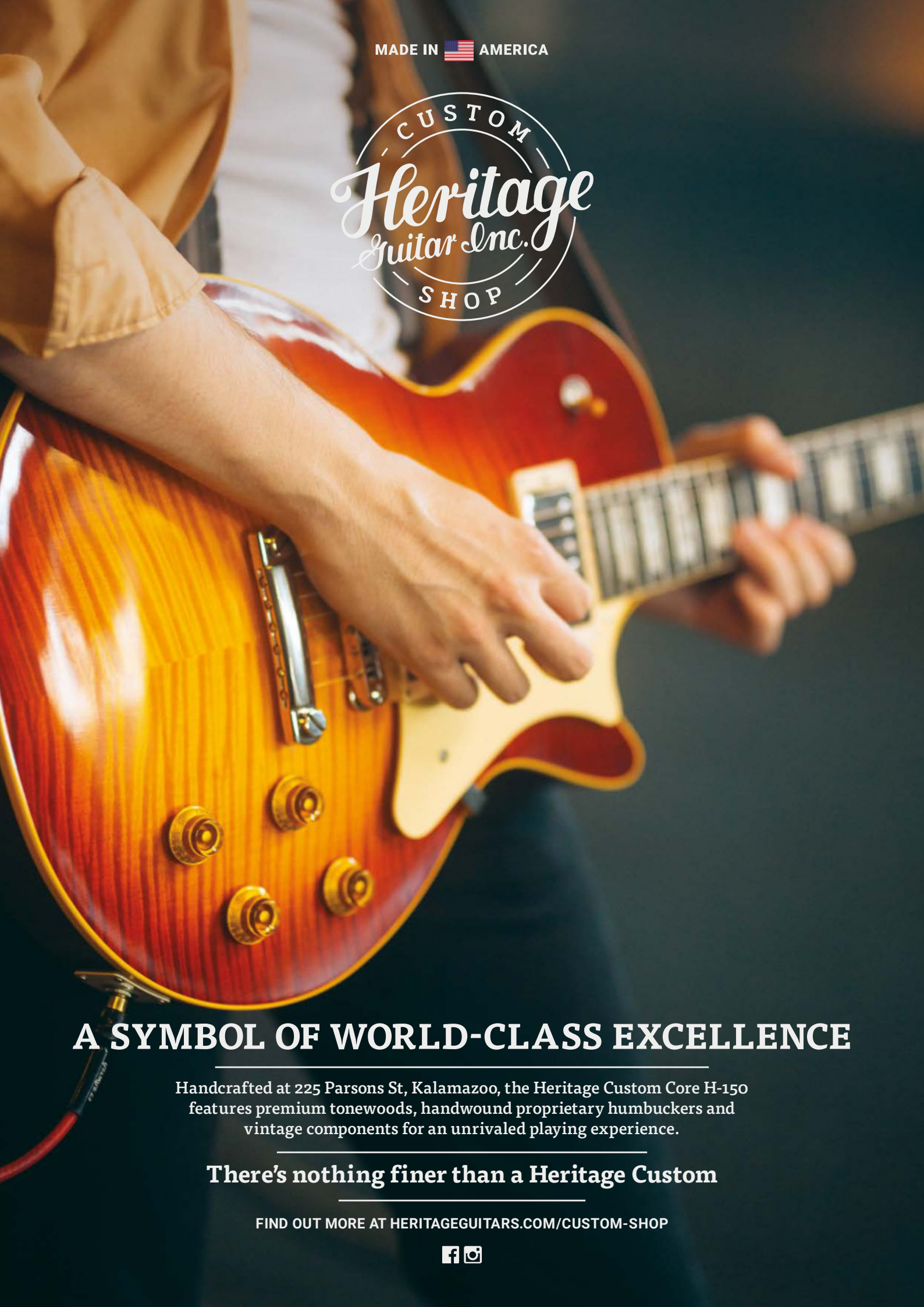
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